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November / December 2025

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OLDMUTUAL WEALTH
DOUBLE CENTURY

ALAN HATHERLY
CHECK OUT HIS RACE-WINNING BIKE ON P.26

8 Rules For Race-Day Success

Pro Tactics For Every Team

All The Banter

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BEST GIFTS FOR ANY RIDER

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UNLOCK SPEED!

EXPERT SKILLS AND TIPS TO GO FASTER TODAY

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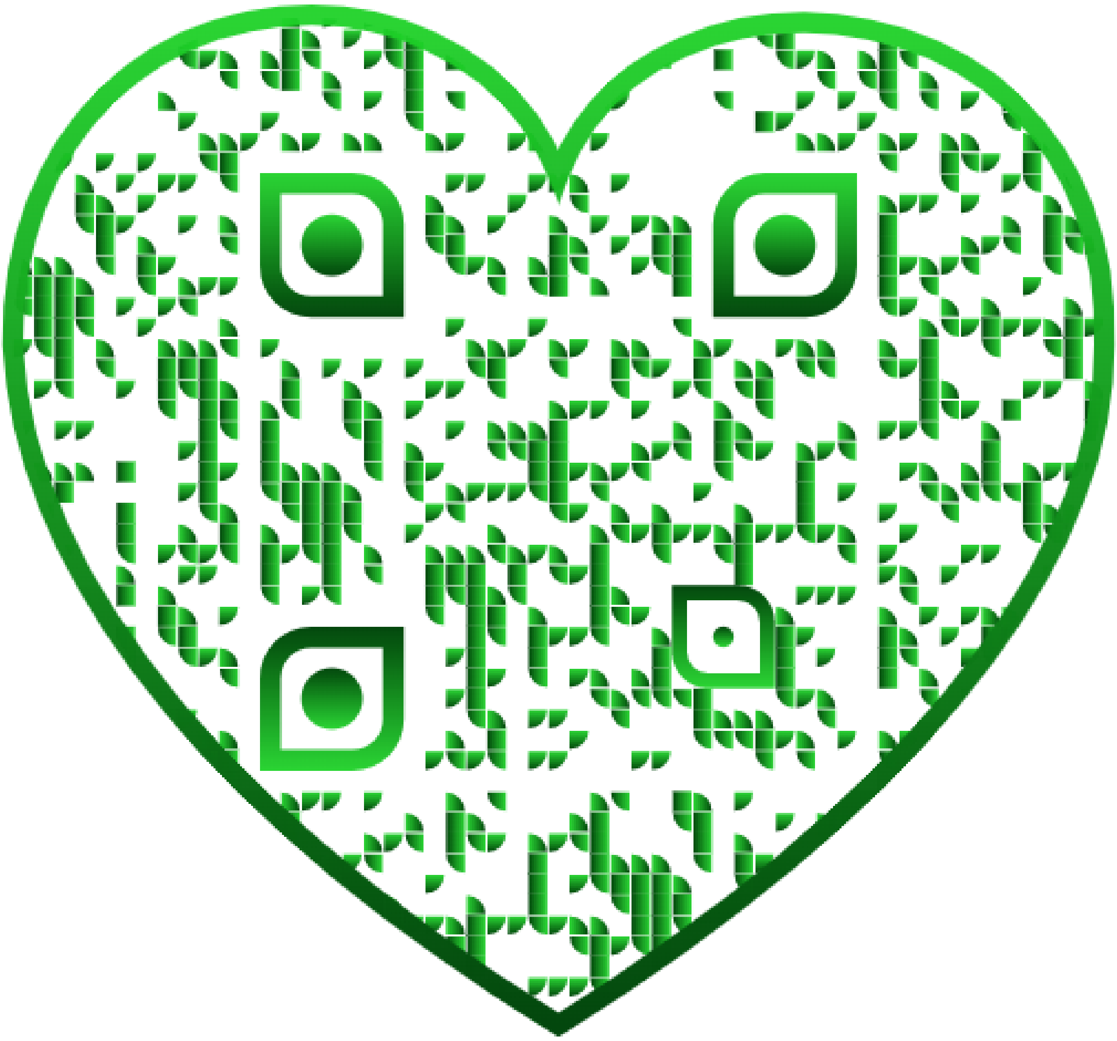

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Image: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century

Bicycling

The Truth About & Performance

BEST GIFTS FOR ANY RIDER

UNLOCK SPEED!

EXPERT SKILLS AND TIPS TO GO FASTER TODAY

COVER PHOTO

By Craig Kolesky

Newly crowned double XCO world champ Alan Hatherly, carving it up in his Cape Town backyard.

What Riders FEEL. What CABAL DELIVERS.

Johann Trotzky –
Team Realty Dynamix
Every ride feels personal, it's more than a bike, it's built to reflect me. The handling is sharp and responsive, yet smooth, stable and built to unlock new speed. Every corner feels effortless, and every straight feels lightning fast.

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EDITORIAL

EDITOR **Jon Minster** jon@qbf-agency.co.za
SENIOR DESIGNER **Mark Arendse**
CHIEF SUB/MANAGING EDITOR **Dave Buchanan**
ONLINE **Kirsten Curtis**
SCIENTIFIC EDITOR **Prof Ross Tucker**

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MATTHEW KADEY, NAMRITA BROOKE, TREVOR RAAB, A. NONYMOUS, TOBIAS GINSBERG, DAVID MOSELEY, GERALD THE IDIOT, DAVID GEORGE, JACO VENTER, FELIX RITZINGER, DAN CHABANOV, MATT PHILLIPS, ALAN HATHERLY, MIRIAM VAN REIJEN, KIM LE COURT-PIENAAR, SZYMON GRUCHALSKI, WAPPO, JANI MARITZ, GARY GREEN, OLD MUTUAL, ILA STOW, NICK WEBB, DEON DE VILLIERS, WALTER KLEYNSCHELDT, STEFAN COETZEE, STEW NOLAN, ELLIOT MINSTER, COLIN HOFFMANN, CHRIS WILLEMSE, DARIO BELINGHERI, PARIS GORE, TIM DE WAELE, ALAN VAN HEERDEN, ROBBIE MCINTOSH, AXEL BRUNST, ZAYNE BOTHA, FARHAD SADER, ELIZABETH MILLARD, CRAIG KOLESKY, KRISTEN WAGNER, BRIAN DALEK

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF / PUBLISHER

Mike Finch mike@qbf-agency.co.za

ADVERTISING SALES TEAM

CHIEF SALES GUY **Paul Goddard** paul@fivetwelve.co.za | +27 82 650 9231
ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE **Tanya Finch** tanya@fivetwelve.co.za | +27 82 961 9429

ADMINISTRATION AND ACCOUNTS

Kim Woolrich hello@qbf-agency.co.za

CONTACT US

www.bicycling.co.za
+27 83 267 7499
Bicycling SA, 147 Main Road, Rondebosch, 7700

QUICKBROWNFOX (PTY) LTD DIRECTOR: **Michael J Finch**
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QUICKBROWNFOX
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Trevor Raab

When I get to the coffee stop, I order…

"… an ***Americano with hot milk****. I should be daring and order a cortado one day, but I'm still working up to it. Baby steps."*
– JON MINSTER, EDITOR

"…a ***double espresso****. The act of gently stirring a double espresso while in cycling kit, wearing a casquette, at a sidewalk table, is the coolest thing ever."*
– MIKE FINCH, PUBLISHER

"…a refreshing glass of anything besides 'mud' – I have my reasons… ***Iced tea*** *is a favourite."*
– MARK ARENDSE, SENIOR DESIGNER

"…a ***double cortado and banana loaf****, no mucking about. Both keep me charged up for the return leg home."*
– PAUL GODDARD, AD GUY

*"…****cappuccino and a muffin****. Call me a creature of habit. One day I might branch out; but for now, this does the trick."*
– KIRSTEN CURTIS, ONLINE

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PRESIDENT
Jonathan Wright

SVP/GLOBAL EDITORIAL & BRAND DIRECTOR
Kim St. Clair Bodden

GLOBAL EDITORIAL & BRAND DIRECTOR
Chloe O'Brien

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RACE BUDDIES

ONE OF THE BEST THINGS about working for *Bicycling* is that occasionally, I'm invited to really great events. That was the case in September, when I jetted to OR Tambo for Old Mutual go2berg – a seven-day stage race through the Free State and KZN.

It's always a bit daunting, going to a big event like this on your own. The usual thoughts percolate as you sit and worry on the plane: *Have I trained enough? What if I get sick? Did I pack everything?* But most importantly: *I don't know anyone! Will I find someone to ride with? Who will I sit with at dinner?*

Luckily, all of these worries are usually not worth, er, worrying about. My mind was already eased at the baggage carousel, when I noticed a few other people standing around with helmets strapped to their backpacks. "Are you going to go2berg?" "Ja! You?"

One of those people was Nick Webb from Bike Hub, every cyclist's favourite classifieds website. Nick also had a media entry, and we soon became race buddies. By Frankfort on day one, Nick and I had already joined up with fellow Capetonians Deon de Villiers, Walter Kleynscheldt and Stefan Coetzee, and our crew was complete.

If you've ever done a multi-day event, you'll know how these things work. The people you end up hanging with are the ones who ride at (sort of) the same speed as you do. You end up in the same start batch, and at the lunch table afterwards. You buy each other beers and find each other on Strava. You stop when someone gets a puncture, and you cross the finish line together at the end. You banter about previous races and about life in general, and you marvel at the scenery that is usually new to all of you.

The race-buddy bond is a special kind of bond, and if you're really lucky, it's one that continues beyond the event. I'm sure many readers are still riding with friends they made at races in years gone by. I know I am.

Talking about friendship, the Old Mutual Wealth Double Century is one of the most potent bonding events on the calendar.

When you ride 200km in a team – where everyone does their pull, where everyone stops to help with mechanical issues, where everyone lifts to and from Swellendam and bunks together in often cramped accommodation – you quickly forge deep connections. It's no wonder so many corporates use the DC as their primary team-building event of the year.

If you're reading this on the stoep of your guest farm cottage with a view of the Langeberg, having got over the line earlier, don't forget to say cheers and thank you to your race buddies around the braai later. These are your people, and you're privileged to be among them.

Thank you to the organisers of go2berg and the DC (is it coincidence that Old Mutual is the title sponsor of both?) for giving us two of the most special events on the South African cycling calendar. You can read about them in this issue – and if you're looking for a challenge that will stimulate your mind and your body, and hopefully get you a gang of new friends, then put one or both on your wish list for 2026.

Jon Minster

▲ EDITOR JON MINSTER (RIGHT) WITH NICK WEBB FROM BIKEHUB, NEXT TO THE POOL AT CHAMPAGNE SPORTS RESORT IN THE DRAKENSBERG – THE FINISH VENUE FOR GO2BERG. NICK GAVE JON A LESSON IN HOW TO RIDE DOWNHILLS PROPERLY, AND HOW TO GET READY FOR A STAGE AT THE ABSOLUTE LAST MINUTE. MASTERFUL STUFF.

Image: Stew Nolan

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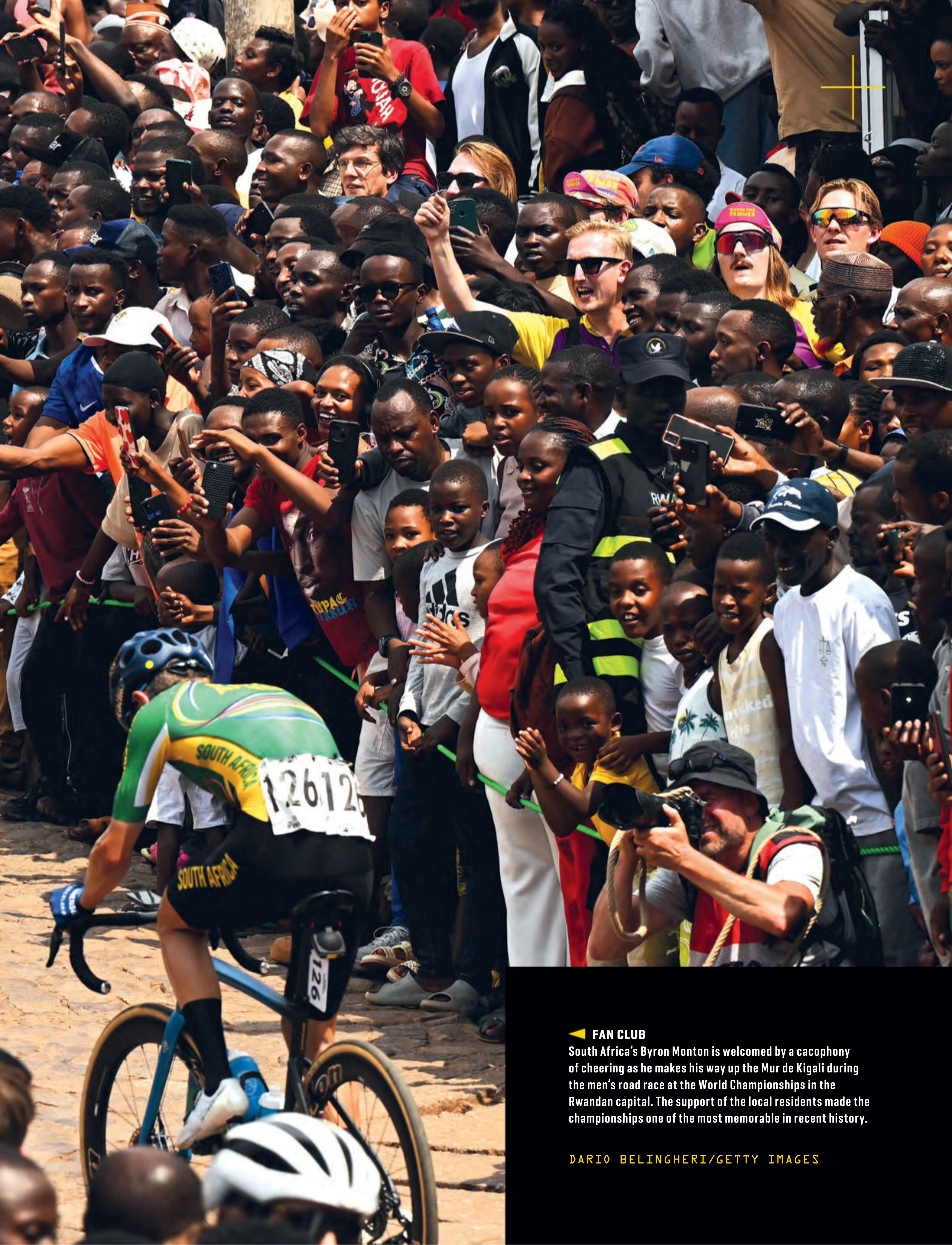
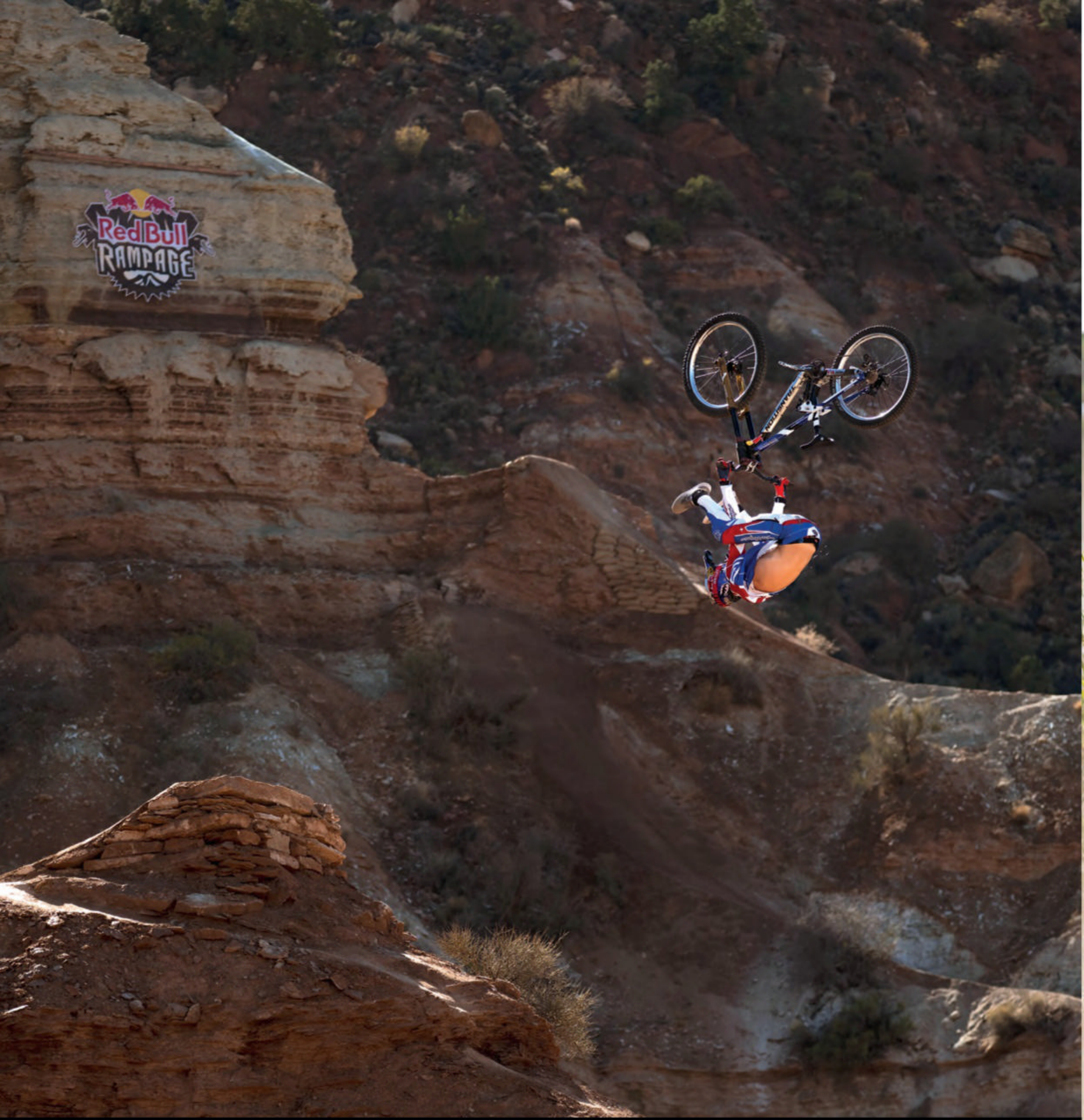


FAN CLUB
South Africa's Byron Monton is welcomed by a cacophony of cheering as he makes his way up the Mur de Kigali during the men's road race at the World Championships in the Rwandan capital. The support of the local residents made the championships one of the most memorable in recent history.

DARIO BELINGHERI/GETTY IMAGES



▲ THIS SIDE UP
Jaxson Riddle takes best trick prize with a heel-clicker backflip at Red Bull Rampage in Utah, USA. The event is the pinnacle of big-mountain freeride: a contest that tests creativity, control, and – most importantly – courage.

PARIS GORE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

LOW FLYING ►
Jaedon Terlouw leads PYGA Euro Steel teammate Michael Foster across the harsh, dusty terrain that makes up most of the route for the five-day Momentum Medical Scheme Cape Pioneer. The race was won by the Toyota Imbuko Specialized ChemChamp team of Travis Stedman and Tristan Nortje.

OAK PICS

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CAPE PIONEER

▲ **GREEN TRAIN**

The peloton snakes its way through spectacular gardens during the season-ending Tour of Guangxi in Nanning, China. Nanning is often called the 'Green City' – an oasis filled with parks and a unique blend of modern and traditional charm.

TIM DE WAELE/GETTY IMAGES

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NEW STUFF

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■ Remember the iPod Shuffle, that tiny music player beloved by runners and cyclists? If you've been mourning its demise, you're not alone – many people have been hankering after a simpler way to listen to music, free from a phone or internet connection.

Enter the Mighty 3 – a compact little player that works without a phone, screen or internet connection (except to download and sync).

Designed in California and now available in South Africa, it lets you download up to a thousand songs or podcasts from Spotify or Amazon Music, and listen offline. Small and lightweight, with a clip, it pairs easily with Bluetooth or wired headphones – perfect for long rides and walks in the forest.

The battery is claimed to last up to eight hours, and it comes in four colours: blue, red, grey and lavender (to complement your favourite cycling jersey).

Image: Mike Finch

THE SYMPTOMS OF SITTING

BY ELIZABETH MILLARD

THE DANGERS OF SITTING ALL DAY have been well researched. The reality is that even for those of us who ride regularly, it's all too easy to rack up way too much time at your desk or on the couch.

Studies link prolonged sitting to negative health outcomes such as poor cardiovascular function, mood disorders, chronic back and neck pain – and even shorter lifespan. Researchers have also looked into exactly how much activity you need to offset these risks, most recently in a meta-study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

Looking at the data from major lifestyle habit studies in Norway and Sweden, the study assessed the behaviours of about 12 000 people over the course of two years. Participants wore activity trackers and reported health factors such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes.

The good news? The researchers found that just 20 to 25 minutes of daily physical activity might be enough to counter the risks associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

Analysis of the tracking data showed that being sedentary for more than 12 hours a day was associated with a 38% higher risk of death, compared to eight hours of sitting, but only among those who did less than 22 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day.

"Basically, the takeaway from our research is that sitting is not that dangerous, as long as you do regular physical activity," says lead researcher Prof. Edvard Sagelv from the School of Sport Sciences at the Arctic University of Norway. "Most importantly: doing those 25 minutes of activity will significantly lower health risks from sitting, but doing *more* than that will provide even more benefits."

BREAK IT UP

It's also important to note that exercise should be done over the course of the day to break up sitting sessions, rather than only taking a walk at lunch, for example. Sagelv adds that you should be consistent in adding more activity to your routine. The best approach is just to keep adding minutes.

"Doing exercise sporadically won't cut it," he says. "The key is continuous engagement, because the body is always adapting to your demands."

> "...25 MINUTES OF ACTIVITY WILL SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER HEALTH RISKS FROM SITTING, BUT DOING *MORE* THAN THAT WILL PROVIDE EVEN MORE BENEFITS."

For those who sit for prolonged periods and don't get up for breaks regularly, it may take more than just half an hour daily to get the health benefits. For example, a 2022 study in the *Journal of Science and Medicine* looked at how much activity sedentary middle-aged adults with metabolic syndrome needed to reduce the risks of type 2 diabetes and improve cardiovascular health. Researchers in that study found that an hour of light exercise, and some standing peppered throughout the day, could lead to improvements in body composition, blood pressure and blood glucose levels.

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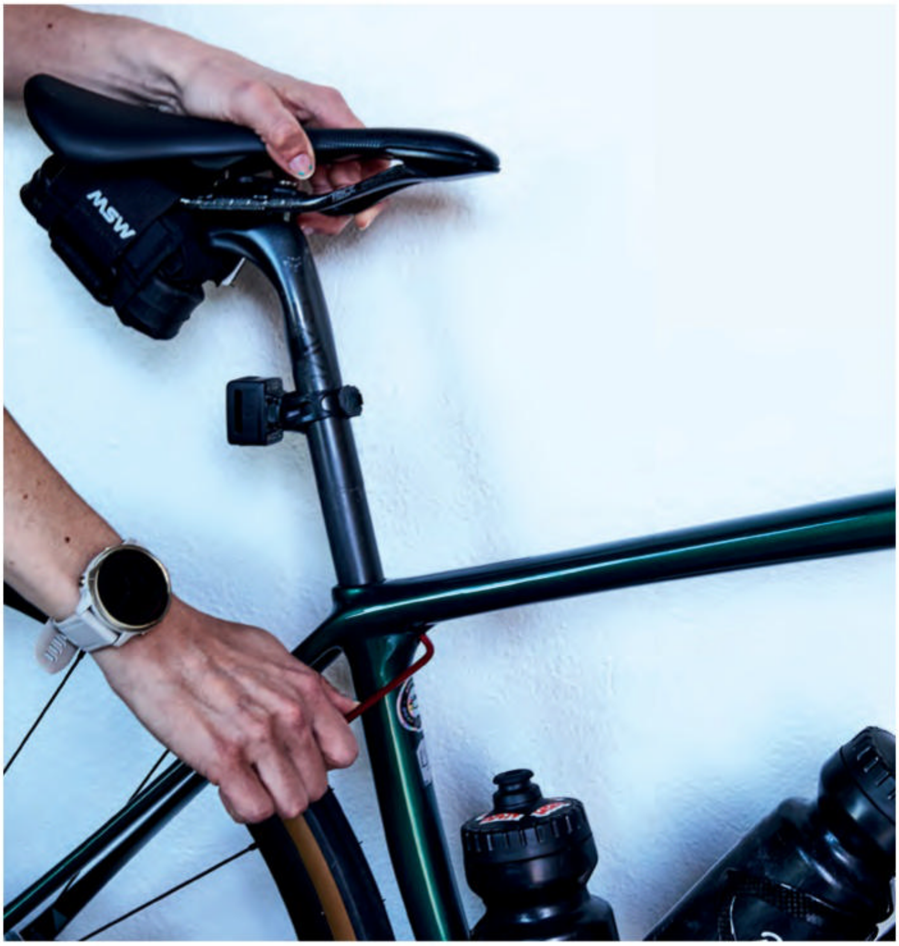

IS YOUR SADDLE TOO HIGH?

BY MATT PHILLIPS

SADDLE HEIGHT IS THE FOUNDATION of a good bike fit. When it's dialled in, it boosts both power and comfort. But it's also surprisingly easy to get wrong.

The most common guideline suggests aiming for about 30° of knee flexion when your foot reaches the lowest point of the pedal stroke. However, this is just a starting point: individual needs vary.

Experts often point to pain behind the knee as a sign of a saddle that's too high. But it's not limited to knee pain – a high saddle can also cause discomfort where the hamstrings meet the glutes, as well as saddle sores, numbness and other issues.

We consulted with Todd Carver, Specialized's Human Performance Manager, to get an expert's advice on signs of an excessively high saddle.

A visual clue that your saddle might be too high is if a rider has to 'reach' for the pedal at the bottom of the stroke. If you drop your hips and rock side to side, or pedal with an exaggerated heel-up or toes-down style, your saddle may be too high.

However, Carver explains that rocking hips or toes down doesn't always mean the saddle is too high, because a low saddle height, tight hamstrings or weak core can cause the same things.

It *is* safe to say that if you're rocking your hips and/or pedalling with your toes down, you should consult an expert to see if you need a fit adjustment, and perhaps a strength and stretching routine.

Specialized's Human Performance Manager, Todd Carver, shows us a technique to check for a too-high saddle:

1. Find a partner
2. Get on your bike and pedal yourself into position. A trainer is the best tool to use, but you could balance in a doorway and pedal backwards.
3. Once in position, stop and freeze. Unclip from both pedals and hang both feet down.
4. Get your partner to swing one pedal to the bottom of the stroke and measure the distance from your heel to the pedal with locked knees.
5. Repeat on the other side.
6. If the distance from heel to pedal is greater than one centimetre, then your saddle could be too high. **B**

STUFF YOU NEED TO KNOW

■ Despite the media reports, **British hill-climb champ Andrew Feather did *not* ride faster than Tadej Pogačar** in the Pogi Challenge in October.

Feather, along with just over a thousand other amateur participants, was given a six-minute head start on Pogačar up a 9.1km climb in Slovenia, at a 7% average gradient.

The world champion caught everyone but Feather, who did indeed finish 'first' by three minutes. But the reality is that because of the head start, Pogi rode the climb three minutes faster.

Images: Trevor Raab; Supplied (Feather)

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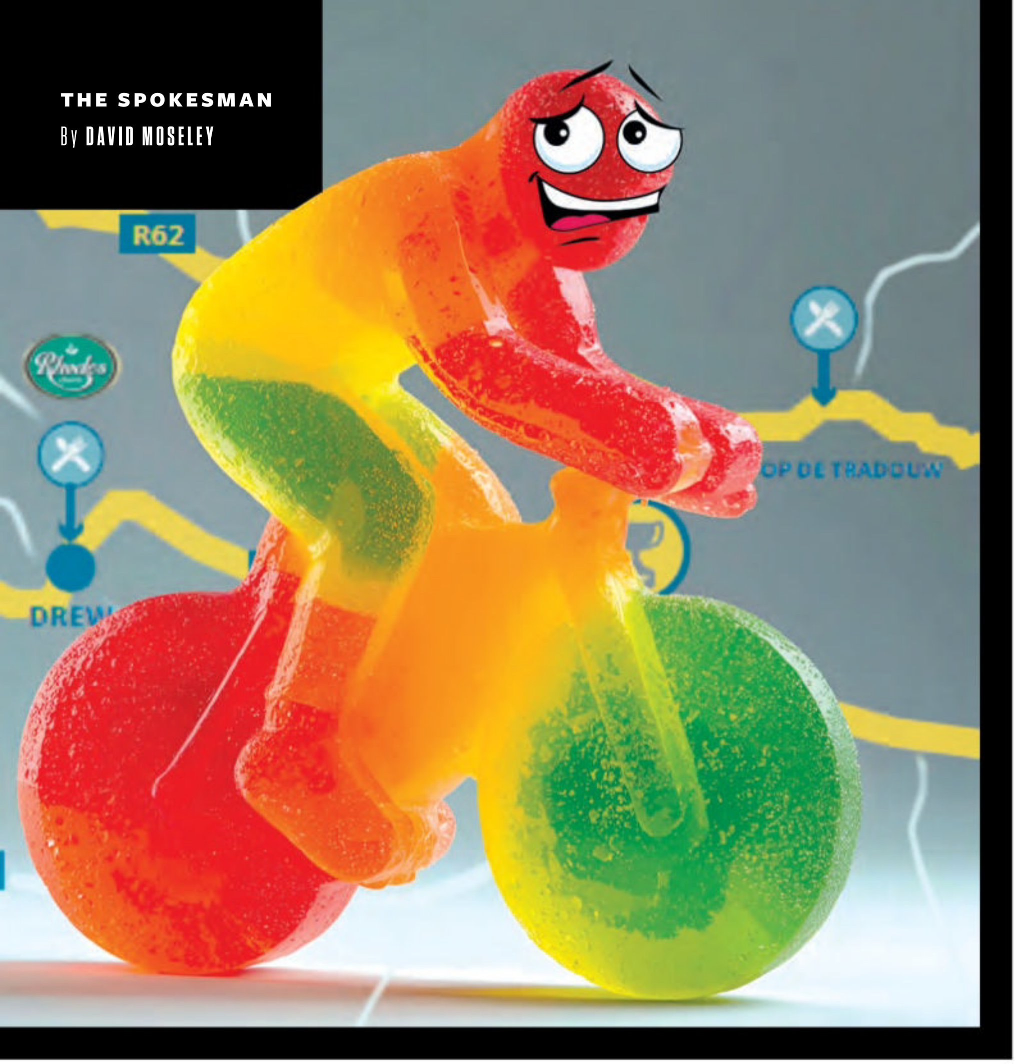
THE SPOKESMAN

By **DAVID MOSELEY**



WHO ATE ALL THE WINE GUMS?

I PARTICIPATED IN ONE DOUBLE CENTURY where the rain was so vicious for 202km that I had to wear sunglasses just to protect my eyes. I couldn't see anything, but at least my retinas survived a power-wash.

At another DC, a teammate dropped his CO2 bomb while fixing a flat tyre; it bounced off the ground and whizzed past my frontmost part, caressing me fleetingly like a coy wife on honeymoon.

These are vivid memories from South Africa's most unique cycling event (though not as vivid as seeing an all-women team lined up on the roadside for a group pee). But they don't come close to the disaster that was my very first Double Century…

As soon as I rolled out of the Swellendam Showgrounds and onto the road for my DC debut in 2012, the writing was already on the wall: I couldn't clip into my pedals. I turned to my teammate, David Bellairs of Cape Town Cycle Tour fame, and asked – bemused, and somewhat sheepishly – "How do these things clip in?"

I wish I could say that Dave jumped off his bike to assist; instead he rolled his eyes dramatically and let out a deep groan: "Oh, lord."

It got worse from there. About 10km into the ride, Dave asked me (perhaps taking pity on me, or perhaps wondering if he should just push me into a ditch and leave me for the vultures – er, sweeps) whether the bike I was riding was actually mine.

Of course it wasn't, I told him happily. It belonged to Adri, my much shorter female friend. Cue another cry of exasperation, because there I was – all 6-foot-2 and 85kg – on a medium-size woman's bike. What could go wrong?

The first cramps kicked in around 90km. They came and went in waves until I could take it no more. At the 160km mark, I gladly jumped into the air-conditioned back-up vehicle (this was the good old days, when the team car could join after the lunch stop), joining two celebrity riders from our team who had already called it quits much earlier into what was a sweltering day for bike riding.

> "HAD I KNOWN WHAT SWEET TREATS AND DELICATE DELIGHTS WERE TO BE FOUND IN THE CAR, I WOULD HAVE 'CRAMPED' MUCH EARLIER IN THE DAY."

Had I known what sweet treats and delicate delights were to be found in the car (the snacks, not the ladies), I would have 'cramped' much earlier in the day.

At some point on our way to the finish, Mike Finch – the publisher of this venerable periodical – tried to jump in with us; but he was awfully sweaty, so we threw him out. The previous editor of the magazine, the late Tim Brink, came looking for a Coke; but Liezel, Vanessa and I had to inform him that regrettably, 'someone' had finished all the drinks. Then Dave Bellairs arrived; on the hunt for wine gums, which had also mysteriously disappeared.

It was my first DC, my worst DC, but also my most memorable. The only downside is that I haven't been able to eat wine gums since.

Oh, and Dave has never invited me back, for some reason. ***B***

Illustration: Jon Minster

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As told to **DAVID MOSELEY**

ILA STOW GOES WITH THE FLOW

MOUNTAIN-BIKE STAGE RACER, & JACK OF ALL TRADES AT THE BIKE PARK AT CONSTANTIA UITSIG

WHEN THE CAPE EPIC made the decision to add media e-bikes to their coverage, it changed the way fans experienced the racing. For the first time, the audience was dropped into the heat of the action as the e-bike camera crew chased the leaders into tight corners, through bumpy singletrack and up never-ending climbs.

It's fair to say that the addition of the e-bike camera has been the event's most important innovation of recent years – and present right from the start was Ila Stow. With a mountain biking pedigree that stretches back to a childhood full of bikes (her stepfather is former downhill champ Chris Nixon), she was the perfect woman for the job.

That was then... Stow has since switched her focus back to elite-level racing in the UCI Women's category, at stage races all over South Africa and the world. She's a four-time Epic finisher, and placed 11th at this year's event with partner Cherise Willeit.

She's also a qualified chartered accountant, and helps Nixon run the impossibly popular Bike Park at Constantia Uitsig in Cape Town. Keeping it in the family, husband Darryn is a mountain-bike coach, and her son Remi spends all his spare time riding the Bike Park trails.

"He's already better than me," says Stow.

■ **I take my coffee...** In caffeine tablets! I don't drink coffee. I only drink tea – rooibos tea. I must be the only cyclist who doesn't drink coffee. Even Chris says, "I'm not sure how I feel about this."

■ **I'd love to go for a ride...** all over the world. I love the sense of adventure. And that's what cycling brings. I've travelled through Rwanda and Malawi. I did the Malawi trip with my mom on my 21st birthday; after that I was sent to Rwanda for an auditing job, so I took my bike with me. I've done a bit of travelling with the Epic Series... and on a few occasions I've just explored after racing overseas.

■ **The secret to happiness...** is going with the flow. Like this morning: I woke up and I was supposed to train, but Remi's stomach was sore so I couldn't train. I just went with it! You can't let little things upset you. I think another way of saying it is, "You can't have too many expectations about how each day will go."

■ **My greatest exhilaration...** is just being a girl, riding the downhill lines in Tokai in lycra... haha! Seriously, though – I do like trying new things. From a riding point of view, that would be trying to clear new obstacles. But I'm not actually too adventurous. It needs to be within my limits.

■ **My biggest fear...** is heights! Definitely heights. And open roads. I'm so scared of road riding. I think it's the speed you get up to on the bike, and knowing how many things could go wrong so easily.

■ **A moment of pure clarity...** comes when I'm on the bike, riding by myself in the middle of nowhere.

■ **When I wake up...** I'm generally with Remi, then it's 'good morning' to Darryn, then I jump onto the indoor trainer. It's already set up, ready to go. I have the Wahoo Kickr fan; but for three years I've been asking my son to change the setting, because I didn't realise I could connect it to my phone and change the setting from there. He was very unhappy when he found out he'd been changing the fan speed for no reason for three years!

■ **I rage against...** not riding my bike! I become a bad person if I don't. I also rage against winter. I rage internally. I really don't like winter. I get grumpy. But I don't rage too much. I'm quite a calm person.

■ **I wish...** more people could just enjoy riding and not put too much pressure on themselves. ***B***

Image: Jon Minster

48 SECONDS FASTER THAN THE WORLD.
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ALAN HATHERLY'S WORLD CHAMPS-WINNING BIKE

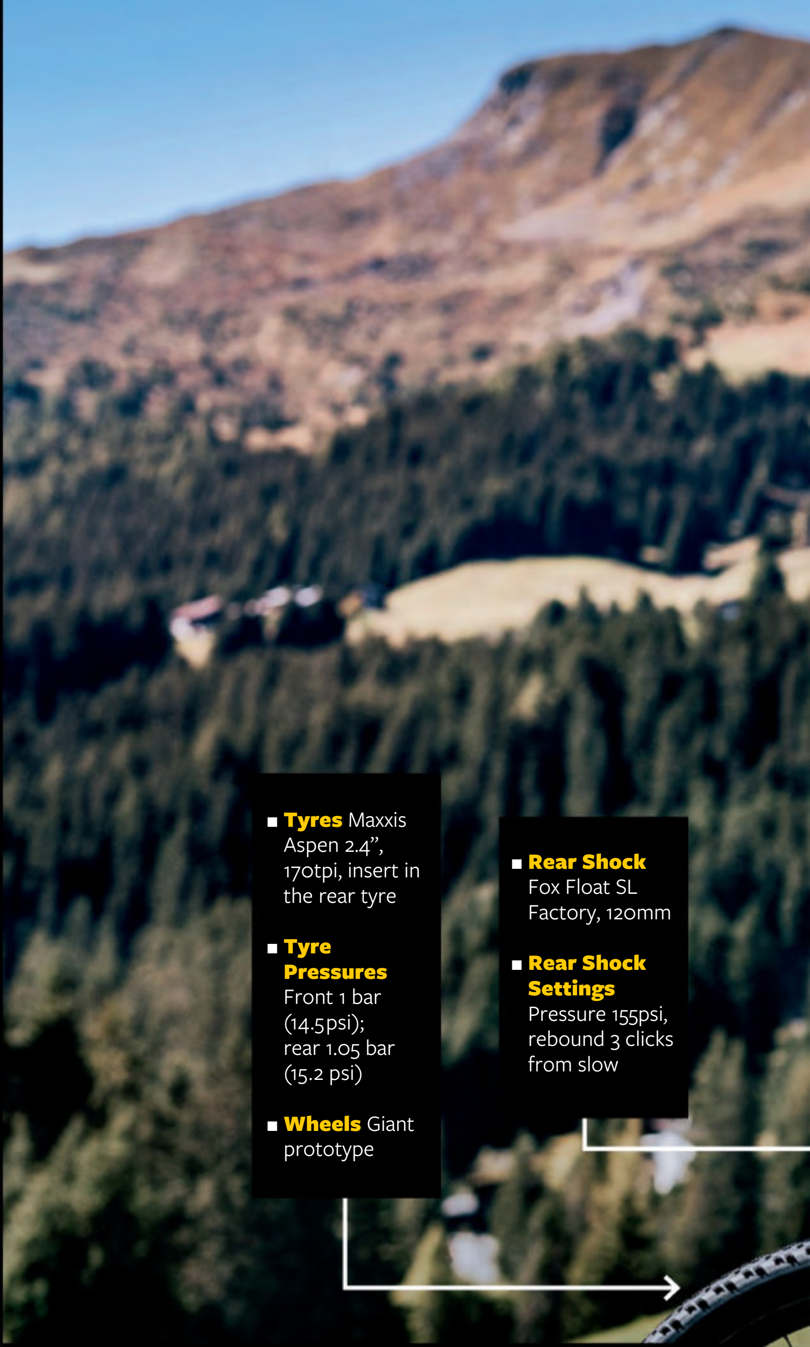
ALAN HATHERLY became only the fifth rider in the history of the UCI Mountain Bike XCO World Championships to win two or more titles when he romped to victory for the second year in a row at Valais in France during September.

Hatherly took the title riding a brand-new bike – Giant's latest version of their iconic Anthem – due to arrive in South Africa in January 2026.

Eagle-eyed fans might have noticed the main difference: the suspension design is completely different to that of the current Anthem. It's an evolution of Giant's FlexPoint Pro set-up, but with the shock now mounted horizontally, similar to race bikes from competitor brands such as Specialized and Cannondale.

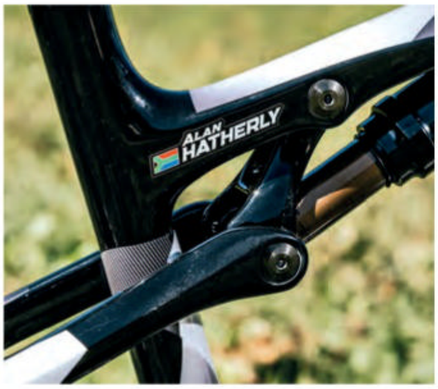
HERE ARE THE DETAILS...

Images: Supplied

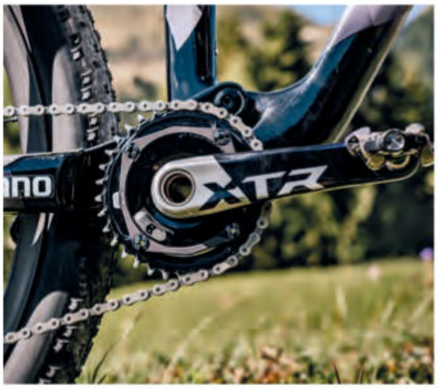


- **Tyres** Maxxis Aspen 2.4", 170tpi, insert in the rear tyre
- **Tyre Pressures** Front 1 bar (14.5psi); rear 1.05 bar (15.2 psi)
- **Wheels** Giant prototype

- **Rear Shock** Fox Float SL Factory, 120mm
- **Rear Shock Settings** Pressure 155psi, rebound 3 clicks from slow



The new Anthem will have a horizontally mounted shock, freeing up space in the main triangle for a second bottle cage.



Local is lekker… and fast. Hatherly uses a custom cSixx chainring (usually 34T) on the latest Shimano XTR cranks, with a power meter.

Hatherly rides his forks quite hard (95psi) and his front tyre fairly soft (1 bar, or 14.5psi). Seems to work for the world champ!

- **Saddle** Giant Grit SLR
- **Dropper Post** Fox Transfer (non-SL version), 110mm
- **Bar** Contact 35mm, 720mm wide, 0° rise, 9° back sweep
- **Grips** ODI
- **Stem** 100mm
- **Brakes** Shimano XTR Trail levers (M9220), with M9200 callipers
- **Shifter** Shimano XTR Di2 M9250 IR shifter
- **Fork** Fox 34 SL Factory, 120mm
- **Front Fork Settings** Pressure 95psi, 3 volume spacers, rebound 6 clicks from slow
- **Frame** Giant Anthem prototype
- **Pedals** Shimano XTR M9200
- **Power Meter** Yes
- **Rear Mech** Shimano XTR Di2 M9250 long cage
- **Cassette** 9-45T
- **Chainring** cSixx 34T
- **Cranks** Shimano XTR M9200, 170mm

As told to **MIKE FINCH**

► **ALL SMILES.** KIM LE COURT-PIENAAR WAS IN YELLOW FOR FOUR DAYS AT THE 2025 TOUR DE FRANCE FEMMES AVEC ZWIFT, BREAKING THE AFRICAN RECORD.

COURTING SUCCESS

SOUTH AFRICAN-BASED, MAURITIAN-RAISED **KIM LE COURT-PIENAAR** BECAME THE FIRST AFRICAN CYCLIST TO WEAR THE YELLOW JERSEY IN THE TOUR DE FRANCE FEMMES. HER RISE HAS BEEN SPECTACULAR.

THE STORY OF HOW KIM LE COURT-PIENAAR reached the pinnacle of women's cycling is legendary. After spending most of her career racing in South Africa, the Mauritian-born former Absa Cape Epic champion and four-time Cape Town Cycle Tour winner finally got a crack at the big time in 2024, after AG Insurance-Soudal took a chance on her, despite her relatively 'old' age of 28.

In 2023, the previous year, her husband Ian had contacted every one of the pro teams in a last-ditch attempt to get Kim onto a World Tour team. Eventually, it was Natascha Knaven-den Oude – the team manager at Belgian-based AG Insurance-Soudal – who saw something in Le Court's results and believed in her potential.

Knaven-den Oude's faith has been richly rewarded. With stage wins at the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France Femmes, along with her historic yellow jersey at the Tour de France Femmes this year – the first African woman to achieve the feat – Le Court is now one of the most exciting racers in the women's peloton.

How crucial is teamwork in an event like the Tour de France Femmes?

■ Honestly, it's everything. We might not have the biggest budget like some of the other teams, but we make up for it with how close we are as a group. At the Tour, every rider played their role perfectly, whether it was protecting their leaders, covering moves, or just making sure I had bottles or ice when I needed them.

The staff behind the scenes – the soigneurs, mechanics, coaches, DS's – everyone plays a massive role that people don't always see. What I achieved there was only possible because of the whole team, on and off the bike.

Did you surprise yourself with your performance at the Tour de France Femmes?

■ It went way beyond what I thought I could do at this point! Wearing yellow and realising I was the first African to do it... It was surreal; something I'll never forget. And to top it all off, I broke the record by being the first African Rider (man or woman) to wear the yellow jersey for four days.

At the same time, though, it showed me what's possible – not just for me, but for African cycling. And that makes me hungrier for more.

Women's cycling seems to have reached a new level of competition and support. Do you agree?

■ The sport has changed so much in just the last few years. The races are harder, there are more of them on the calendar, the level is higher, and the support from fans is incredible. You really feel the momentum building. It's special to be part of this generation, which is shaping women's cycling for the future.

Your team is one of the smaller women's pro teams. How do you compete against the big-budget outfits?

■ For us, it's about racing smart and believing in each other. We don't have the same resources as the super-teams, but that actually makes us sharper. We have to take our chances, be brave, and commit fully when the

FAST FACTS

Kim Le Court-Pienaar, 29

Residence: Somerset West, Cape Town

Nationality: Mauritian

Husband: Ian Pienaar

Team: AG Insurance-Soudal

Palmares:

- **First African** to wear the yellow jersey at the Tour de France Femmes
- **Most consecutive days in yellow** by an African cyclist at the TDF
- **Giro d'Italia** Stage winner
- **2025 Liege-Bastogne-Liege Femmes** winner
- **2023 Absa Cape Epic** winner (with Vera Looser)
- Four-time **Cape Town Cycle Tour** winner

Images: Tim de Waele/Getty Images; Tobias Ginsberg

opportunity comes. Sometimes, being underestimated can be an advantage.

But to be honest, we might not have the biggest budget, but I think we're one of the best teams out there. And we're only getting started. It's very exciting what the future will bring.

Tell us a little about your training to compete at World Tour level?

My training is quite structured. I do a mix of endurance, polarised intensity, and specific strength and sprint work. Altitude has also become an important part of my preparation. It's not about endless hours; it's about making every session count. I work closely with my coach, and we adapt things depending on how I'm feeling and where we are in the season. It's not about quantity, it's about quality.

Who coaches you?

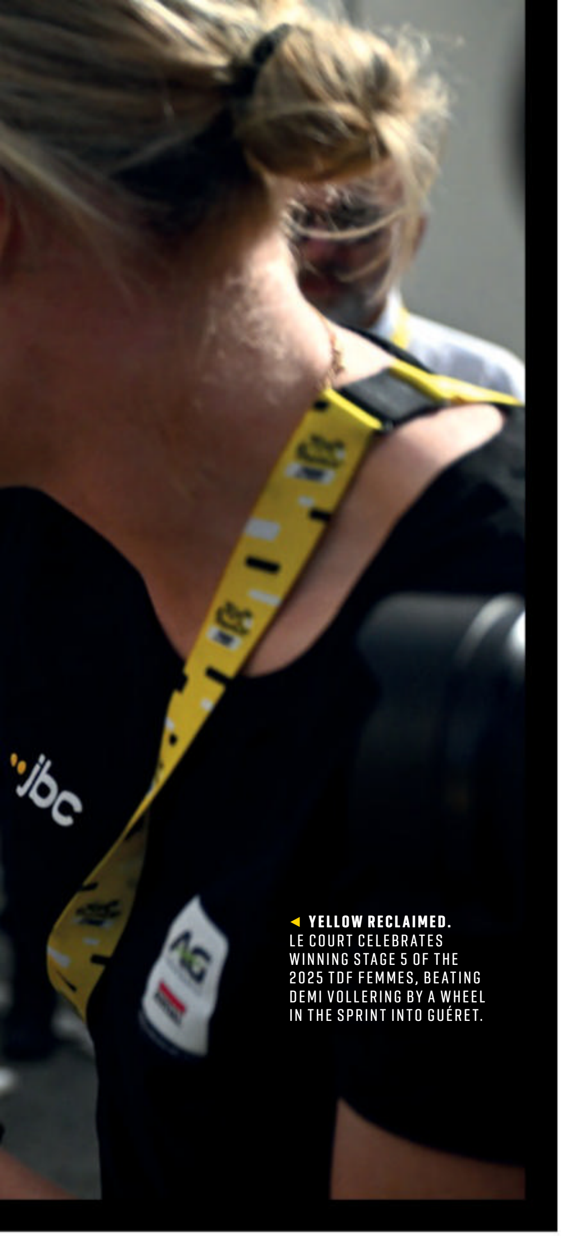
I've been coached by [*Cape Town-based South African*] Jeroen Swart since early 2022. He's changed my life as an athlete. When I switched to him, the first big goal we set was to win the Cape Epic in 2023, and we did. Then, once I signed for the World Tour, our target was a pro win, which came at the Giro d'Italia in 2024. This year's big goal was Liège-Bastogne-Liège. Achieving that win was massive.

At the Tour, the plan was a stage win, wearing yellow, and testing myself for the GC. We managed to check so many of those boxes, with more to aim for next year. Of course, I also have great support from the team coaches, but Jeroen is really the foundation of everything I've achieved so far.

There have been a few references recently, from athletes like Demi Vollering and yourself, around the challenges of being a female athlete in top-class sport – in particular, around the effects of the menstrual cycle on performance.

It's something that still doesn't get talked about enough, but it's a reality for every female athlete. The

Image: Szymon Gruchalski/Getty Images



◀ **YELLOW RECLAIMED.** LE COURT CELEBRATES WINNING STAGE 5 OF THE 2025 TDF FEMMES, BEATING DEMI VOLLERING BY A WHEEL IN THE SPRINT INTO GUÉRET.

> “IT’S SOMETHING THAT STILL DOESN’T GET TALKED ABOUT ENOUGH, BUT IT’S A REALITY FOR EVERY FEMALE ATHLETE. THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE AFFECTS SO MANY ASPECTS OF PERFORMANCE: ENERGY LEVELS, RECOVERY, HYDRATION AND EVEN CONCENTRATION.”

menstrual cycle affects so many aspects of performance: energy levels, recovery, hydration and even concentration.

For me, being aware of my cycle and tracking it closely has been a significant help, as it allows my coach and me to adapt our training or expectations as needed. There are days when you just don’t feel at your best, and that’s not weakness, it’s just biology.

At the Tour, I spoke openly about it because I think it’s important to normalise these conversations. The more open we are, the less stigma there is, and the more it helps younger riders coming through to realise they’re not alone. If we want true equality in sport, this side of female performance must be part of the discussion.

After Pauline Ferrand-Prévot won the TdF, she was criticised by some for having lost too much weight. What are your thoughts on the issue?

There’s always pressure in cycling when it comes to weight; but for me, health must come first. If I fuel properly and keep my body strong, the results come. I don’t obsess over the scales, I focus on feeling powerful and consistent.

That said, in some races – or for certain goals – you have to do what’s needed to perform at your very best. Men do it in their sport, so I don’t think it should be such a big taboo in women’s cycling. We’re professional athletes, and sometimes that means making physical changes depending on the targets we’ve set.

The difference is that we do it with the guidance of the best experts in the business: nutritionists, coaches and doctors. So, it’s done in a healthy, controlled way. It’s never about extremes; it’s about giving yourself the best chance to perform at the right time, while keeping long-term health in mind.

There has been a lot of talk around consuming high levels of carbs during races, with some pro riders claiming to use well over 120g per hour. What’s your fuelling strategy?

Nutrition is a huge part of performance. In races, I aim for around 90g of carbs per hour – sometimes more, depending on the intensity, race duration, weather conditions and the race goal.

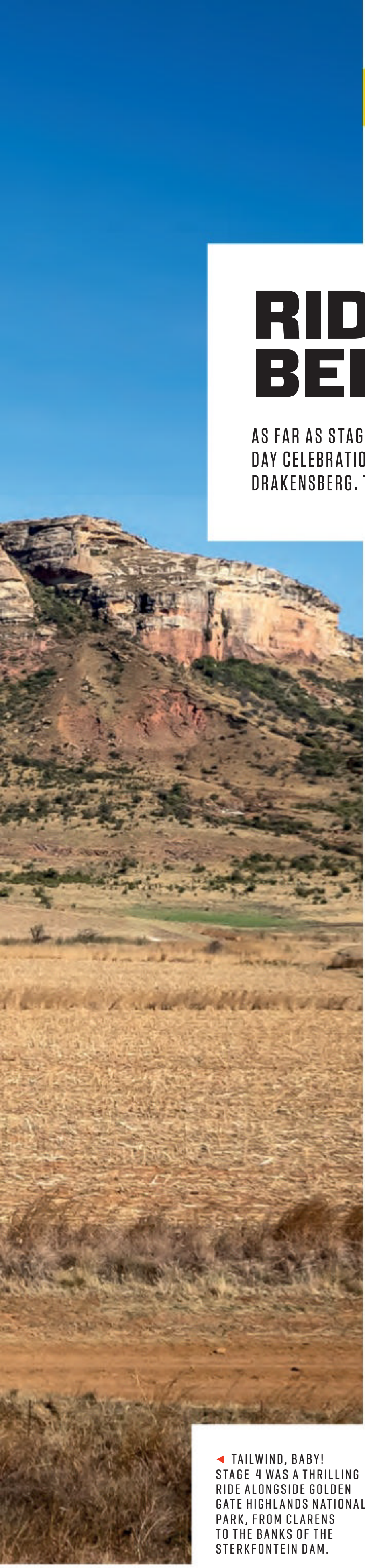
Hydration is just as important, especially in hot conditions. I make sure I’m taking electrolytes, not just water. And I always test my fuelling in training, so it feels natural on race day. That way there are no surprises when it matters most. I train my gut, so that it’s easy to eat so much on race day.

After an amazing year, where to from here?

The Tour gave me so much confidence. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: I want to win everything, or at least try to win everything. I have way too many goals and dreams to just settle!

Winning Liège was massive, and the Classics will always be a big part of what I want to achieve. At the same time, I want to keep building as a GC rider, because I believe there’s still a lot of potential there. **B**

WORDS JON MINSTER **IMAGES** STEW NOLAN



RIDE THE BELOVED COUNTRY

AS FAR AS STAGE RACES GO, **OLD MUTUAL GO2BERG** IS ONE OF THE MOST RELAXED – A SEVEN-DAY CELEBRATION OF THE LANDSCAPES AND FARMING COMMUNITIES BETWEEN JOBURG AND THE DRAKENSBERG. THINKING ABOUT ADDING IT TO NEXT YEAR'S WISH LIST? HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD.

◄ TAILWIND, BABY! STAGE 4 WAS A THRILLING RIDE ALONGSIDE GOLDEN GATE HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK, FROM CLARENS TO THE BANKS OF THE STERKFONTEIN DAM.

WHEN SOMEONE MENTIONS 'MOUNTAIN BIKING' in South Africa, a few places naturally come to mind. It's not hard for your brain to conjure up Banhoek, near Stellenbosch, for example, or Karkloof in KZN. Maybe you picture a rocky trail in the Overberg, or the hardpack red dirt of a Bushveld nature reserve.

But I doubt you'd picture *this* road – somewhere in the Free State between Frankfort and Reitz.

(Between… where, and what? Exactly.)

It's definitely not a road *I* ever imagined myself riding on a mountain bike, but it's actually pretty spectacular. The rising sun is low behind my left shoulder, lighting up a wall of dark clouds that sift drizzle onto mielie fields in the distance. A herd of cows look up from their grazing. A spurwing goose tracks across the sky.

I have nothing to do today but pedal my bike and look around at a part of the country I've only ever seen at 120km/h, behind the windscreen of a car on the N3. What a privilege.

We're on Stage 2 of Old Mutual go2berg, aptly named 'Free State of Mind'. If you're not familiar with the event, go2berg is a seven-day stage race that starts in Villiers, south of Joburg, and ends at Champagne Sports Resort in the Drakensberg.

But it's not really a race. There *is* racing, for some; but for most, it's a way to immerse yourself completely in an often overlooked corner of the country. You're hosted in style by *platteland* schools, you meet the farmers at the water points, and you get just a small taste of the community spirit and can-do attitude that exists in abundance in rural South Africa.

It's heartwarming stuff, and it's no wonder the race attracts a horde of international visitors. This year there were riders from New Zealand, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, the UK, Russia, Australia, the US… and from all over South Africa.

I'm not sure what the gravel is like around Lake Baikal, or Auckland, but this Free State stuff is pretty sweet. Suspension locked out, head down, I chase the storm over the plains towards a spitbraai at Hoërskool Reitz.

MORE THAN A BIKE RACE

■ We'd rolled into Frankfort the day before, after a fairly challenging logistical feat by the organisers in getting everyone and their bikes from Joburg to the start line in Villiers. By then it was already clear that this was going to be a tour, not an eyeball-bleeding dash to the finish.

The kids from Villiers Combined School were there to cheer us at the start, even though it was a Saturday, and the 48km route along gravel roads and farm tracks was neutral – i.e. not timed. This was "to get us into the vibe", according to organiser Craig Wapnik. (Or 'Wappo', to his mates. Which was basically all of us. Even though most of us had only just met him.)

While we rode, the Springboks made mincemeat of the All Blacks in Wellington,

▲ A MISTY SUNRISE OVER THE FREE STATE PLAINS NEAR REITZ ON STAGE 3. GO2BERG IS A RACE, BUT IT'S ALSO A CELEBRATION OF THE LANDSCAPES AND PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S AGRICULTURAL HEARTLAND.

and when we arrived at our overnight camp on the fields of Hoërskool Wilgerivier, there was *definitely* a vibe. Braai smoke swirled, grinning farmers handed out *springbokkie* shooters, and the kids were there again – to help with bike-washing and bag-carrying.

It was the same story at Hoërskool Reitz the next night. The spitbraai dinner in the school hall, prepared entirely by volunteer parents, was the stuff of legend; as was the bag-carrying ability of some of the biggest grade sevens I've ever met. (The rumours about Free State rugby players are true.)

Stage 3 – the 109km 'Boss Stage' – saw the end of the flat part of the Free State, as we pedalled to Clarens. There was an audible sigh of relief from certain Capetonians when mountains punctuated the horizon once more. Sandstone buttresses, sighing grassland, destroyed legs…

(Thanks for that, Wappo – that was also a vibe, just a different kind of vibe.)

In Clarens, we got a break from the tents and bunked down in hotels and guesthouses around town, gathering that night in the hall at Clarens Primary.

And if there was anywhere along the route where the spirit of go2berg flared most brightly, it was there, around those beautifully decorated tables. The school choir performed, and principal Peter Mokoena told us about the school's relationship with the race, which goes back many years.

Clarens Primary is a critically underfunded government school. But thanks to their partnership

▲ SCHOOL KIDS FROM CLARENS PRIMARY WELCOME THE RIDERS HOME AT THE END OF STAGE 3. THE EVENT IS AN IMPORTANT FUND-RAISER FOR MANY SCHOOLS ALONG THE ROUTE, AND THE HOSPITALITY AT EVERY STOP IS INCREDIBLE.

with go2berg, and the passionate support of the entire Clarens community, there are infrastructure, feeding and teaching initiatives in place that make a real difference to every single learner who walks through the doors in the morning.

"This is what change looks like," Wappo said, thanking Mr Mokoena. "This is what South Africa can do."

Dry eyes? Not many.

THE DROP

■ Do you enjoy riding your mountain bike? Here's my wish for you: may you one day get the chance to ride a point-to-point stage on empty roads, with a belting tailwind behind you. The. Whole. Day.

I've ridden plenty of great roads in my life, but this experience – on Stage 4, from Clarens to the banks of Sterkfontein Dam – was out of the top drawer. We barely had to pedal as we raced along next to Golden Gate Highlands National Park, under a bluebird sky and surrounded by sandstone cliffs.

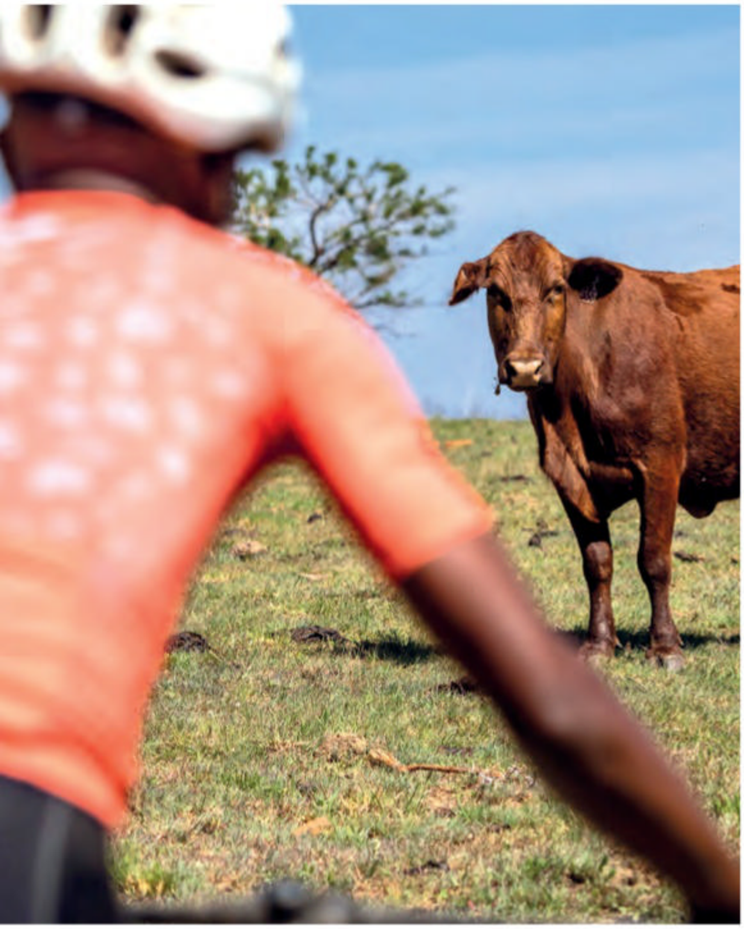
The main bump on the route is called Mount Paul – we climbed its flank and rocketed down cow paths on the other side towards the dam, which was flecked with whitecaps like an inland sea. Vultures circled, the wind howled, and the supremely talented mom-bakers from Harriston School in Harrismith were waiting with the most next-level table of home bakes any of us had ever seen.

The wind died down that afternoon, around the time I went back for my fourth helping of mini milk tarts, sausage rolls, cupcakes and quiches; and just before Nicole Heard kneaded my legs back into shape on the massage table. (Nicole also happens to be a talented baker.)

That night, Harriston headmaster Peter Huntley reiterated what Peter Mokoena had told us in Clarens – go2berg's partnership with the various schools on the route makes a tangible difference, not just to the schools themselves but to the entire community in these small towns.

"We can't thank you enough," he said.

No, it's us who can't thank *you* enough, Mr Huntley. I don't think I've ever experienced as hospitable a race village as that one next to Sterkfontein Dam – and it was all thanks to the kind people of Harrismith.



◀ CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE: THE DESCENT OFF THE ESCARPMENT FROM THE FREE STATE INTO KZN, VIA BEZUIDENHOUT'S PASS. MANY OF THE TRAILS PASS THROUGH CATTLE FARMS. RUDI JOUBERT, AMPUTEE CYCLIST AND OLD MUTUAL AMBASSADOR, HELPS EX-BOK BREYTON PAULSE FIX A PUNCTURE. A BRIDGE OVER THE TUGELA RIVER, NORTH OF WINTERTON.

ANYONE WITH A VAGUE RECOLLECTION of high-school geography will know that South Africa is ringed by mountains that hold up a high central plateau. We were on the edge of that plateau, and go2berg was about to get real.

Stage 5 – 'The Big Drop' – took us from Sterkfontein to the edge of the escarpment, and then down, down, down, via a white-knuckle 4x4 track called Bezuidenhout's Pass.

This part of KZN is Berg & Bush territory; and Gary Green, the founder of that race, is also closely involved with go2berg. There's another way down the escarpment, along a vertiginous trail called 'Great Wall, My China', but there had been various foot-and-mouth outbreaks on the cattle farms in the area, which made certain areas off limits. As a cattle farmer himself, Green was acutely aware of the reluctance of landowners to have hundreds of potentially infected bike tyres crossing their farms.

It wasn't just on Stage 5, where Green rerouted us down Bezuidenhout's Pass; every stage seemingly needed a last-minute diversion, which he and his team handled with good humour and professionalism. It might have been causing stress on the back end, but the changes were so seamless that the riders hardly noticed.

Inventive farmers had built dipping troughs for the bikes, which we had to use occasionally; but besides that, the potentially devastating epidemic hardly impacted the race. Yet another example of the farming community pulling together to give our travelling circus the best South African experience possible.

SPIOENKOP 2.0

■ Home base for two nights near the tail-end of the race was Em'seni camp, on the banks of the Tugela River, which is also home base for Berg & Bush. The highlight of Berg & Bush is probably the best part of go2berg, too – at least from a pure mountain-biking perspective…

Stage 6 – 'Super Singletrack' – looped from the Tugela towards Spioenkop, the mountain made famous by the massacre on its summit in 1900 during the Anglo-Boer War, when Boer forces ambushed British soldiers in the trenches that became their graves.

We rode up the northern side of the mountain – roughly along the route the Boers had taken – on a purpose-built trail, featuring more hairpins than we could count. But it's our descent off the summit that I still dream of: 15km of flowing downhill bliss, first along the spine of the mountain and then looping

SPECIALIZED

◄ GO2BERG FOUNDER CRAIG 'WAPPO' WAPNIK DEMONSTRATES HOW TO 'CROSS' THE FINISH LINE AT CHAMPAGNE SPORTS RESORT.

across its southern face, all the way to a well-earned mug of homemade chocolate milk at the finish.

Describing the Spioenkop descent is an exercise in avoiding clichés, so I won't even try. I'll just say this: go and ride it one day – on Berg & Bush, or go2berg – because it will stay with you forever.

THE END

■ It's been a week since you set off from Villiers. Your life has been distilled into a simple, elegant routine: eat, sleep, ride your bike. Your days are filled with sunshine, smiling farmers, and endless roads you might never ride again. Your legs are feeling strong, and your lungs have forgotten the tang of city smog. There's only one problem: this is the last day.

It's easy to imagine doing this forever: pedalling the expanses that South Africa is blessed with, from one district to the next; never too long in a single place; just smile and wave, and crest the next hill towards who knows where.

But the truth is that it takes an army of organisers, sponsors and volunteers to give you the deep sense of peace you're experiencing right now, as you climb your way towards the granite wall of the Drakensberg. The fact that you have to remind yourself about this is testament to just how good Wappo and Green – and the whole go2berg team – are at their jobs.

It's so refreshing to do a stage race that you don't have to stress about; where you can ride yourself fit and not have to keep looking over your shoulder for the sweep vehicle; where everyone gathers in the evenings to celebrate the day's riding, the delicious food, and the people who have made it all possible. ***B***

NEW FOR 2026!

■ **BACK TO THE SEA…** Next year, go2berg becomes **go2sea**. It's not a new event in terms of ethos and community spirit; it's simply a new route, with plenty of exciting new singletrack.

■ CLARENS KICK-OFF

The new route starts in Clarens and follows a similar route to that described here – until Em'seni. Then it's off to Nottingham Road in the KZN Midlands, followed by a singletrack feast through Karkloof Nature Reserve and a stunning finale through the valleys of Zululand, along the Holla Trails network and onto the beach in Ballito.

■ WHAT ABOUT LOGISTICS?

There will be shuttles from major centres, and bike transport through All In Events (*allinevents.co.za*) – they collect your bike from a bike shop near your home, and send it back there after the race. Contact them for rates.

■ HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

go2sea will be in the same ballpark as the 2025 go2berg (about R25 900 for a solo entry). The rate includes accommodation and food in the various race villages, full medical support, luggage transport and some cool kit items and other surprises.

■ THE 2026 ROUTE

Prologue: Clarens singletrack
Stage 1: Clarens to Sterkfontein Dam
Stage 2: Sterkfontein Dam to Em'seni
Stage 3: Em'seni super singletrack
Stage 4: Em'seni to Nottingham Road
Stage 5: Nottingham Road to Karkloof
Stage 6: Karkloof to Harburg
Stage 7: Harburg to Ballito

■ MORE INFO

Visit *go2sea.co.za* for all the details.

Thank you to title sponsor Old Mutual for hosting Bicycling *at go2berg.*

OLDMUTUAL
WEALTH

DOUBLE
CENTURY

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

THE OLD MUTUAL WEALTH DOUBLE CENTURY IS A UNIQUE AND ICONIC RACE ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN CYCLING CALENDAR – A DAY OF TEAMWORK, SUFFERING AND GLORY.

WE CELEBRATE THE 2025 EDITION WITH EXPERT ADVICE FROM LAST YEAR'S WINNERS, DO'S AND DON'TS ON THE DAY, AND ALL THE BANTER TO GET YOU PSYCHED FOR THE START LINE!

40 SNAP
The best shots from last year's DC.

46 HOW TO WIN
Lessons from the fast guys on how to pace your race.

50 ETIQUETTE
The unwritten rules of the Double Century.

53 EXCLUSIVE!
At great personal risk, our anonymous source shares all the juicy gossip about the battle for the top step of the podium.

Cogmanskloof Pass between Montagu and Ashton is one of the prettiest parts of the DC route. Flying through the rock tunnel in full team formation is always a rush.

There are always helping hands nearby for a push up Tradouw Pass, early in the race; or later, outside Swellendam, when the Three Sisters show their faces...

ECC
DC 2024
enjoy
OAKLEY

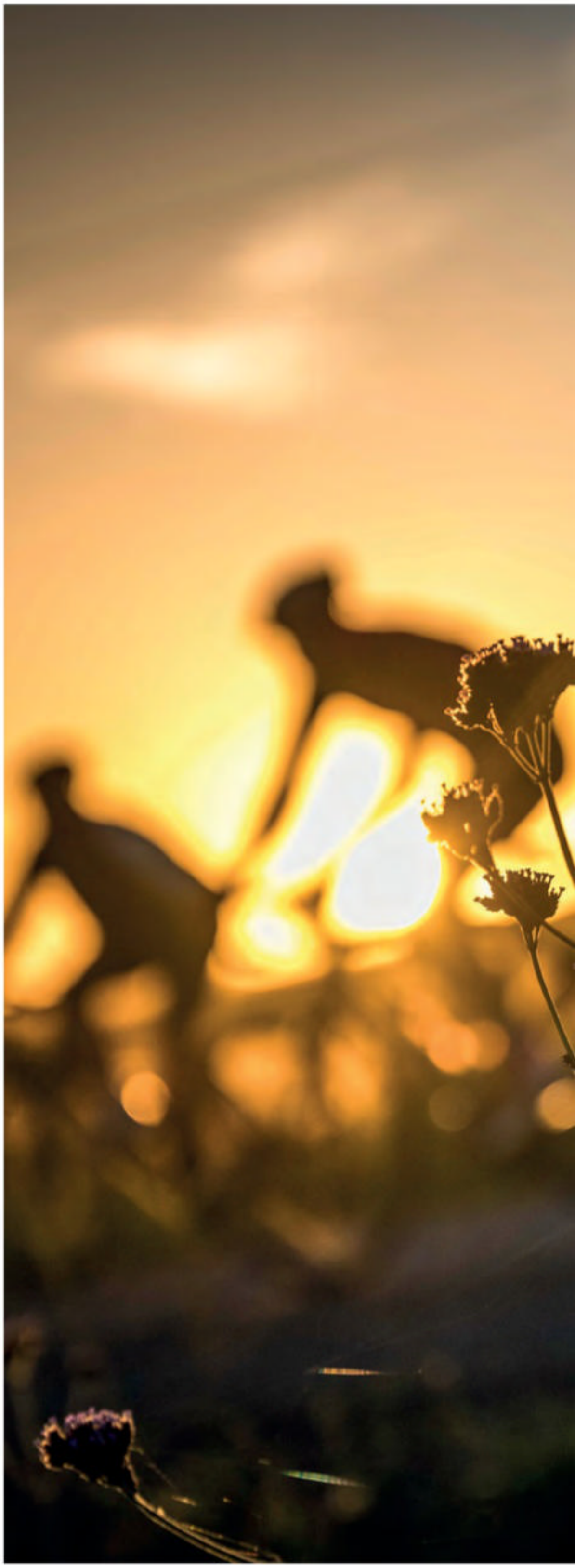
Warren Robertson from Team ECC gets a dousing in the neutral zone . There are two of these mandatory stops along the route, where the timing is paused and riders can refuel and enjoy a brief respite from the heat.

Images: Tobias Ginsberg (this spread); Zayne Botha (previous page) / OMW Double Century

A resident of the historical village of Suurbraak, at the foot of Tradouw Pass, watches the passing parade.

Zayne Botha / OMW Double Century

Swellendam



After bouncing around a bit in the early years, in 2002 the Double Century found a home in Swellendam, and has been held there ever since.

Images: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century

Sunrise on the N2, as cyclists whizz out of town towards the mountains. The DC is unique in that the slower teams start first and the faster teams start later, allowing everyone to gather together in the beer tent at the end.

FURTHER TOGETHER

FOR OLD MUTUAL WEALTH MANAGING DIRECTOR FARHAD SADER, THE DOUBLE CENTURY IS MORE THAN JUST A CYCLING EVENT – IT'S A METAPHOR FOR THE JOURNEY THE COMPANY TAKES WITH ITS CLIENTS.

WHAT GETS YOU UP IN THE MORNING?

I'm lucky to live a blessed life – my energy comes from gratitude for being surrounded by a wonderful family, good health, and a job that I absolutely love.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

'Ordinary people' doing extraordinary things; people who have been dealt a tough hand in life and yet live far more meaningfully than those who have been luckier. The inspiration comes from their attitude and resilience. It's what I aspire to be.

HOW DO YOU STAY ACTIVE?

I've always played sports, so it's a mix of things. At the moment, it's soccer, gym and cycling. Regular sauna sessions also help with sweating!

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE WORLD, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

To see our humanity and kindness shine through in everything that we do; to realise that we're all one, and that the most worthwhile endeavour in life is to collectively raise each other up. People should realise that life is actually short – we have to make the most of the time we have!

WHY DOES OLD MUTUAL WEALTH SPONSOR THE DOUBLE CENTURY?

It's about the principle of 'Further Together'. Much like at Old Mutual Wealth and how we work with our clients, it's all about thoughtful partnerships and working together in a synchronous fashion, using each other's strengths to achieve a desired outcome. This teamwork brings out a camaraderie between riders, encouraging each other throughout the journey, and pedalling and persevering through challenging conditions together, making it an unforgettable experience.

By sponsoring this event, we look forward to making lasting connections with fellow riders, the Cycle Tour Trust, and the residents of Swellendam. It's also an opportunity to provide an experience that exceeds expectations, through a sport that continues to evolve; and to make a difference in the Overberg community.

PARTNER CONTENT

OLDMUTUAL

WEALTH

WHAT DOES OLD MUTUAL WEALTH HAVE TO DO WITH ENDURANCE CYCLING?

If you're old enough, you might remember that Old Mutual's involvement in endurance sports started many decades ago, with the Old Mutual World of Endurance TV show! Sport is an incredible way for businesses to connect with communities, and to motivate, encourage and inspire. The theme of the event – especially because it's a team race, focused on sustained effort – also mirrors the journey we 'ride' with our clients and their wealth.

WHAT DOES OLD MUTUAL WEALTH DO AS A COMPANY?

Wealth management, which is what we provide, is like having a pro cycling team looking after your money. You're the rider, chasing big goals; but behind you is a squad keeping the pace, drafting you out of headwinds, tuning the bike and setting the smartest line through every climb and descent. Our financial advisers are your coaches, mapping the route; the portfolio managers are the mechanics who fine-tune performance; and risk protection is your helmet, keeping you safe if things go wrong. The result? You get to ride further, faster and with more control – because wealth management turns the grind of money into a smooth, strategic race towards the life that you want.

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Farhad Sader, 43
Managing Director Old Mutual Wealth, six-time Old Mutual Wealth Double Century Finisher
Residence: Cape Town
Born: KZN

***FARHAD SADER** Farhad is an experienced executive in the financial services industry – specifically wealth management, asset management and insurance. Starting out 15 years ago with a tech background and ambitions to build disruptive technologies, he is relishing transforming an industry that is ripe for change. The choice to do it from inside a large, traditional corporate underscores his desire for taking on the seemingly impossible. Not an actuary or an accountant, but still capable of interpreting financial statements, Farhad holds a Master's degree and is an alumnus of the Harvard Business School. Outside of what used to be called 'the office', you will find him spending quality time with his wife and raising their three daughters, riding his bicycle, or travelling the world in pursuit of the best espresso.*

WINNING TIPS TO ACE YOUR RACE

SOME TEAMS GO TO THE OLD MUTUAL WEALTH DOUBLE CENTURY TO WIN; SOME GO FOR FUN. OTHERS GO TO GET 12 RIDERS OVER THE LINE. WHATEVER YOUR REASONS FOR RIDING, THE NAME OF THE GAME FOR A SUCCESSFUL 202KM DC SATURDAY IS TACTICS. ARRIVE WITH A GAME PLAN, AND YOU'LL LEAVE WITH A RESULT.

BY DAVID MOSELEY

W **WHAT MAKES THE DOUBLE CENTURY UNIQUE?** A few things, actually. To start with, it's 202km long – that's a heck of a long distance, whether you're an amateur, a pro, or one of those middle-aged 'semi-pro' okes in between. The race takes place outside a major centre, so travel logistics play a part in your prep and planning. The 12-person team format is a restriction in that you're unlikely to find 12 committed teammates who can all train and ride at the same level. And you stop for a lunch break

With six determined riders remaining, Team RH77-Factory steamrolls past Bonnievale.

around halfway, then get back on your bike for another 100km of riding. Add all of that up – plus the fact that the race takes place just after winter, when riders are not always in peak shape – and you have a recipe for perhaps the most unique road cycling event in South Africa. Small wonder it sells out every year.

As popular and fun as it is, though, you can't simply rock up and ride. You need to prepare. You need to train. You need to have your *tactics* aligned...

And that's what this article is all about.

THE CLUE IS IN THE FORMAT: 'TEAM' TIME TRIAL

■ David George, a member of the winning team last year (RH77-Factory), says the aspect of the race that he enjoys most is the team format, and the mixed ability of the riders in each team. "You're never going to get 12 riders together who have the same ability or fitness, so it always makes for interesting racing.

"People also enter and then get ill; and each member has different riding strengths. That's what makes the DC unique – all the characters in a team figuring out how to use their skills. Every rider brings something different to the table, so that ultimately you end up with a decent balance."

Former winner Jaco Venter agrees with the balance part. "For me, the most important thing for DC success is having a group of riders who are as equal in strength as possible," he says. "It doesn't help if you only have a handful of strong riders, and they destroy the rest of the group."

So, yes, teamwork is crucial to the outcome of your race. But what does that actually look like?

SHARE THE LOAD

■ A major failing of many DC teams is leaving one or two riders to do all the work, while the rest sit in the bunch the whole day. Fast, medium and slow teams are all guilty of this. Yet the only way to survive the Double Century is for *every* rider to do his or her part. This also speaks to the team dynamic of the event: keep the team involved right to the end, and you have more chance of success.

"Over the years, I've found that if everyone is given a role, then the team is happy. If the team's happy, then the ride goes well," says George.

His advice for snappy team racing is for each rider to do quick, short turns at the front. "I've always been a fan of doing this, as opposed to long, hard pulls. Get a double paceline going, get to the front, pull for a few seconds, and immediately drop down; and let the next rider pull up as you slowly make your way to the back. Historically, this strategy has always worked well at the DC."

Venter concurs: "The stronger riders can maybe do longer pulls on the front, but they must keep the surges to a minimum so they don't hurt the rider who just pulled off and who's now on his way to the back again."

COMMUNICATE!

■ "The DC is not about the strongest rider," says Felix Ritzinger, also a member of 2024's winning RH77-Factory team. "It's about pacing smartly, maintaining that pace, and looking after your teammates on the road.

"It all comes down to communication. If you're the strongest guy, that doesn't mean you have to make it hard for everyone. You need to work with the strengths of the team, and communicate the strategy while moving through the bunch."

Venter agrees that communication is critical. "Tactics are so important on the day. You need to communicate constantly to make sure everyone is on the same wavelength," he says.

"For example, with the 30-minute neutral zones, it's an option to burn riders close to those stops so that some

A full complement of white helmets for Team Valor Femmes as they approach the finish.

Images: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century

Team RH77-Factory pops the champagne at the 2024 DC.

team members can take it easy while the others work; then later in the race, the riders who rolled through at a slower pace have the legs to attack near the end. But this only works if there's clear communication."

George adds: "If one or two riders are simply sitting at the front, they have no idea what's going on behind them, and that's when your plans can go awry."

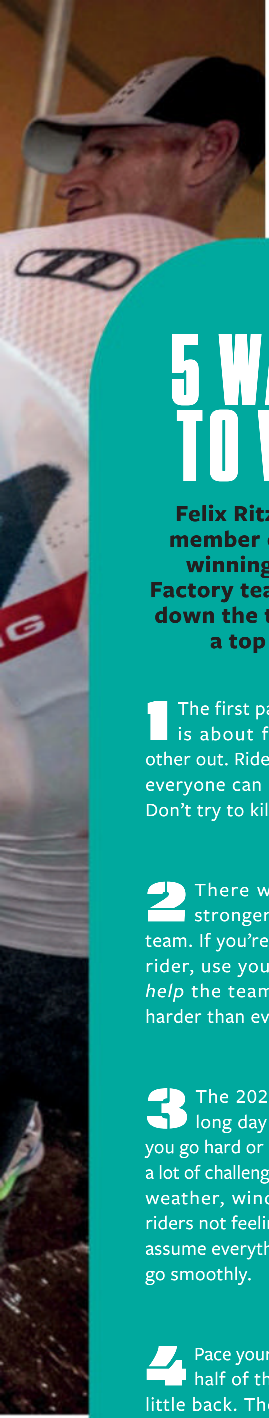
DON'T GO TILL YOU BLOW

The DC is a long day out, even for the winning teams. "It doesn't matter who you are," says George, "202km is far – even the top teams are in the saddle for around five hours. That's a tough day of riding. You can't go flat out from the start, because you'll lose half your team on Tradouw Pass; and if not there, on Op de Tradouw."

George says the tactic of short stints at the front of the paceline not only helps to ensure you don't lose riders on the first climb of the day; you're also able to establish a hierarchy within the team for the rest of the race. "By riding slightly conservatively at the start, you can work out the team strengths."

Venter notes that it's easy to fall into the trap of flying out of Swellendam when everyone's feeling strong, but that's a tactic that always comes back to haunt you later in the race. "The second half is crucial," he says. "It's in that final sector that you know whether you're going to win or you're going to blow up.

Image: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century



5 WAYS TO WIN

Felix Ritzinger, a member of 2024's winning RH77-Factory team, breaks down the tactics for a top ride.

1 The first part of the race is about figuring each other out. Ride at a pace that everyone can keep up with. Don't try to kill each other.

2 There will always be stronger riders in the team. If you're that stronger rider, use your strength to *help* the team, not to ride harder than everyone else.

3 The 202km route is a long day out. Whether you go hard or not, you'll face a lot of challenges on the road: weather, wind, punctures, riders not feeling well… Don't assume everything is going to go smoothly.

4 Pace yourself in the first half of the race; hold a little back. The last 40km is very tough for every rider, so whatever you might gain from a fast start, you'll lose at the end.

5 Tactics! So important. Go into the race with a game plan. The top teams have a game plan, but the middle and back teams should also know where to go slower, where to go faster, when to fuel… All of this will make your day better.

"That's why it's important to take it relatively easy on those early climbs. When you get to 40km to go, and you've gone too hard at the start, you can lose minutes very quickly on the final, steep climbs."

Managing your effort on the climbs is make-or-break at the DC. "This is a race that hurts from start to finish," says George. "You're not going to win it in the first 100km. Your team can't be down to six on that first climb already, so everyone has to get over it together. Thinning of the group too early is a common mistake. After Op de Tradouw, you can regroup and go harder, after losing a few minutes on the climb."

Venter adds that it's important not to take the event lightly. "It's a race in which it doesn′t matter how strong you are. You're always on your limit – because if you're strong, you work harder; if you're not as strong, you fight to do as much as you can without dropping or letting the group down. It′s a tough day out for everyone."

> **"THE SECOND HALF IS CRUCIAL. IT'S IN THAT FINAL SECTOR THAT YOU KNOW WHETHER YOU'RE GOING TO WIN OR YOU'RE GOING TO BLOW UP."**

USE YOUR TEAM WISELY

■ There are 12 riders in a Double Century team. Winners seldom finish with all 12 together, opting rather to cross the line with only six – the minimum number required to finish officially. This means you have six spare riders at your disposal, so to speak, to do with as you please over the course of 202km.

"The RH77 strategy last year was simple,″ George says. "Get six people and maybe one or two spares to the middle feed zone, then get six people to the end. With that strategy, we needed to go through halfway as best we could, and then really attack after the stop.

"But you still don't know how it will play out! In the second half of the race, after we'd dropped six riders, I realised that *I* was now the sixth rider in the team; so I had to hang on with a bit of pressure…"

DON'T BE A FOOL. FUEL!

■ In this day and age, there's no excuse for making nutrition or fuelling errors at endurance events. Yet it's something that riders still manage to overlook, either by planning poorly or through getting caught up in the moment. Bottom line: if your nutrition strategy is faulty, your ride is going to falter.

"Not managing your fuelling can ruin your race," says George. "It's much easier now than it was in the past, thanks to new products and better knowledge; and I think people are more aware of their fuel requirements… And yet riders still get it wrong sometimes."

George adds: "Very simply, buy the best products you can afford, and train your gut to accept them at high capacity."

The most common error seems to be not using your chosen product on training rides, or changing your nutrition just before a race. "If you can absorb carbohydrates efficiently, you'll perform at a higher level on race day," George says. "It's totally something you can train for.

"The problems come when you start eating gel after gel on race day, and you expect your gut to be acclimatised to the high carb load. You might not get sick, but you're not going to be effective."

To get your gut 'in shape', make sure you've done some five-hour rides – big, hard rides – well-fuelled, at 90g of carbs per hour. "Everyone should be at 90g per hour on a 200km ride," George says. "Even if you're going slowly, you should be doing that.

"Fuel early and taper, rather than fuelling late. If you're well-fuelled, you don't need to worry about cramping either, because cramping is a result of incorrect fuelling, and not enough electrolytes. Cramping and bonking shouldn't be a thing anymore." ■

THE 8 RULES OF THE DC

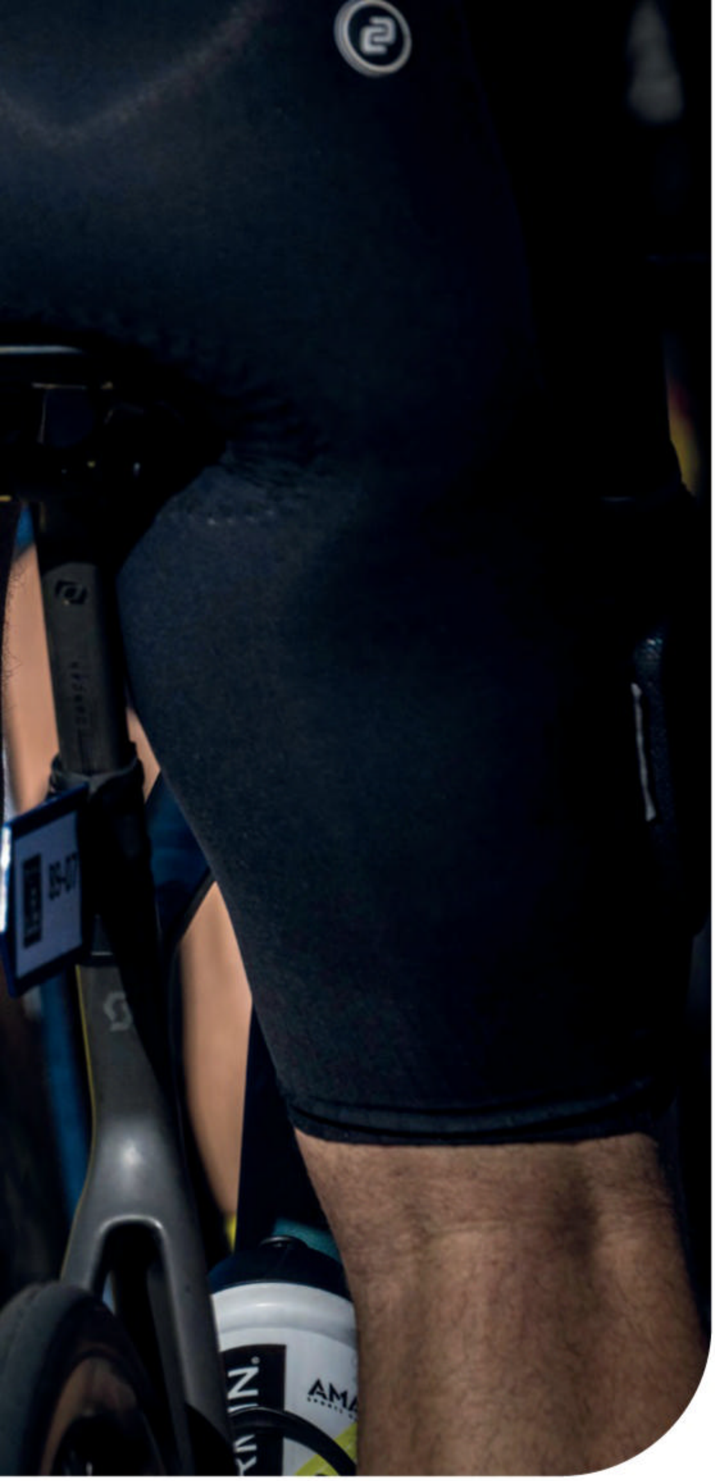
THE OLD MUTUAL WEALTH DOUBLE CENTURY IS NOT AN EVENT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. DEDICATED TRAINING IS JUST ONE REQUIREMENT TO RACE THIS UNIQUE TEAM TIME TRIAL; TO GET MAXIMUM ENJOYMENT FROM THE DAY, RIDERS ALSO NEED A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF RACE ETIQUETTE...

BY DAVID MOSELEY

L

LIKE MANY BIG CYCLING EVENTS, the Old Mutual Wealth Double Century attracts a mix of seasoned campaigners and total newbies. This creates a concentration of cyclists in Swellendam who know either nothing or everything about cycling. As is the case with modern politics, there is no centre.

If you're a lucky DC beginner, then you might have a few old hands in your race-day squad to offer guidance. But even if you're a veteran of multiple races, there's always something that's been left off the checklist



Smiley socks, good. Coordinated smiley socks across an entire team, even better!

Images: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century

as the excitement builds for the start gun.

Fear not: we have you covered, with this thorough, exhaustive and entirely serious etiquette guide…

1 PACK IT, CHECK IT, CHECK IT AGAIN

Even the most experienced cyclist can fall prey to a momentary lapse of memory.

Admit it – you've one-hundred-percent been on a start line before and heard the race announcer send out a last-minute plea: "Does anyone have a spare helmet? Gerald left his helmet at home."

Or, increasingly: "Does anyone have a spare battery for a derailleur? Gerald forgot to charge his derailleur last night." (As you can tell, Gerald is a bit of an idiot.)

When you pack for the DC, pack the night before you leave. Check everything. Wake up and check everything again. If you're still unsure, just take your second helmet anyway.

2 THE SHOE FITS – FOR A REASON

Actually, you can probably get away with leaving most things at home; some good cycle-Samaritan *will* have a spare on race day. (We're always astonished when those start-line requests go out and people are actually able to assist!)

But you simply can't forget your shoes. With shoes, size matters. And even if someone has the right (or right-ish) size, borrowing another cyclist's shoes is the same as asking if you can have a quick roll in the hay with their life partner. Technically, it's doable and you should fit, but it's just Not On.

And remember: once you're at the DC, you're not actually *at* the DC until the race starts. Because due to its increased popularity, many teams stay outside Swellendam, and drive to the start. Triple-checking your wardrobe is crucial here. There's nothing worse than driving painfully slowly through Bontebok National Park at 4am, only for a teammate to pipe up sheepishly that he's left his shoes back at the chalet.

3 ALARMS…

Whether you're the first team to start on the day or the last, Saturday morning at the Double Century demands an early start. Thanks to the team dynamic of the event, you'll probably find yourself sharing a chalet, room, tent or [*checks own race history*] bed with a teammate.

Alarm consistency is crucial. If you're an early riser by necessity (that is, you need four morning ablutions before even thinking about slapping on the bibshorts), then don't set your 3am alarm at full blast.

DOUBLE CENTURY
20min
TO START

Rise and shine! Getting the whole team to the start with all their gear is half the battle won.

FOOD LOVER'S MARKET
2024

Kit is key. Make sure you have everything you need at the start, so you can disrobe with abandon at the finish.

Similarly, if the team needs to be up by 5am, but you prefer a gradual rise rather than a sudden explosion from slumber to total alertness, don't hit the snooze button 18 times.

Starting the day in sync is central to a healthy and happy team performance.

4 NO PAIN IF YOU'VE TRAINED

That's… a lie. On a 202km road race, there's always going to be pain. And this is particularly true of the Old Mutual Wealth Double Century; don't underestimate it.

Ideally, your team should put in a few shifts together ahead of race day.

The reality, of course, is that getting 12 cyclists together every weekend is not always feasible. That doesn't mean you should skip training altogether; if you commit to the race, commit to the training. If you're getting pushed up Op de Tradouw, then (rightly) you shouldn't be invited back.

If you're reading this now – by which I mean very, *very* close to race day – it's too late to train. So if you *haven't* trained… quietly send your team captain a DM, offer your humblest apologies for being a deadbeat cyclist, and head to the nearest abandoned meat-packing warehouse to take up Hyrox.

5 BIKES DON'T RUIN RACES, PEOPLE DO

If you sign up to a team, be a team player. Don't arrive on race day with your clunker that you last rode at Cycle Tour 2010. You can't race (or ride) 202km on flat pedals and wearing takkies.

Get your bike serviced ahead of the big day. Check your spares. In short, be considerate of your teammates. This isn't a solo ride – it's a team event, for team players. Be one.

(Obviously, uh, if you're a machine and you ride a clunker to show what a machine you are, then by all means: go for your badge.)

6 PACE, DON'T PULL

If you're the strongest rider in your team, that's great. You're the best. A champion among chumpions!

But this is a team time trial, not a chance to race into your midlife crisis. You might think you're being a hero, sitting at the front and

Images: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century

> **“DON’T DRAFT. UNLESS YOU WANT TO. OR UNLESS YOU CAN’T HELP IT. BUT DON’T DO IT. UNLESS YOU CAN’T HELP IT.”**

taking all the wind, rain, hail and pollen that the route throws up, but you’re actually destroying morale at the back – and you’re not riding the DC in the spirit of the event.

Get everyone in the team to take turns at the front. The front rider drops to the back, the second rider moves up to the front, and so on. This is a far more efficient way to ride, and it lets everyone in the team bask in hero status throughout the day.

7

DON’T BE DRAFT

Drafting is illegal at the DC. But then again, jumping red lights is illegal in South Africa, and how often do you see motorists flouting that rule?

Bottom line, you’re not *supposed* to draft at the DC. Some teams have outright admitted that they’ve done it to beat their hometown rivals, while winning teams have said that sometimes it’s just an inevitable part of the race format.

So, don’t draft. Unless you want to. Or unless you can’t help it. But don’t do it. Unless you can’t help it.

PSA: Get your bike serviced before the DC. If your tyres and tubes are worn out, replace them.

8

SOCK, HORROR

It shouldn’t be happening in this day and age. You would think that by now, we’d have moved to a higher plane of existence. But sadly, it does. Some riders refuse to move on.

We’re talking, of course, about people who wear secret socks when riding their bicycles. It’s shameful. It’s horrific. Like adding water to your whiskey, it’s a sin.

If you’ve won an Ironman in the last 18 months, you may wear secret socks. But only if you spend the entire race regaling your DC teammates with your Ironman-winning exploits.

Otherwise, do yourself a favour: visit any civilised sporting apparel store, and Purchase. Real. Socks. Better yet, let the team captain choose the socks when the team kit is designed. Any rider failing to follow kit instructions can then be ostracised and mocked for eternity. ■

DC DEEP THROAT

IN BETWEEN STOCKING HIS MUSETTE WITH GLUTEN-FREE RACE FUEL, OUR EMBEDDED 'PRO' (WHO MUST REMAIN NAMELESS, FOR HIS OWN SAFETY) TAKES US TO THE MEAN STREETS OF CAPE TOWN, WHERE THREE TEAMS ARE BATTLING IT OUT FOR THE CROWN OF KINGS OF THE ATLANTIC SEABOARD. AND KINGS OF THE DOUBLE CENTURY, BUT THAT'S A MINOR DETAIL…

BY *ANONYMOUS*

Image: Tobias Ginsberg / OMW Double Century

I'M WRITING THIS FROM A MUGG & BEAN – the only place safe from the prying eyes of Cape Town's elite cyclists, who would never drink their cortados at a coffee chain.

There are a handful of protagonists in the race to become Kings of the Atlantic Seaboard – the official title, coined by an anonymous Instagram account in late 2023, and a far greater accolade than making it onto the top step at the Old Mutual Wealth Double Century.

The major players are Pure Savage (Cape Town's most insufferable cycling group), Mother Amateur Bicycling Club (media-savvy hipsters with moustaches) and La Perla Classic (also known as LPC, and made up of elite Cape citizens on the wrong side of 45). In recent years, new players such as East City Cycles (just a bike shop, really) and Café Racers (Corner Shop Racers, more like) have tried to throw down the gauntlet; but I wouldn't class them up there with the Big Three.

Savage, Mother and LPC all ride the same training route on the Atlantic Seaboard, on the same day; but at ever-so-slightly different times, so they don't have to ride together. And the ultimate decider for Kings of the Atlantic Seaboard honours – besides the various Strava segments at stake – is the annual showdown at the DC.

But once again, let me be quite clear: this is not about winning the Double Century. The goal is to be *Kings of the Atlantic Seaboard.*

TO THE 'CHEATERS' GO THE SPOILS

■ Mother 'won' in 2024. But did they really? No, they cheated – end of story. In fact, they even proudly declared their wrongdoing!

And cheating is precisely what they did again at last's year's DC: they sat in the slip of ASAP Cycling-Team EuroSteel – in clear contravention of DC rules – and hung on for dear life until the end. (I know this because I was right there with them, having dropped off the back of *my* team…)

But Savage, too, are not above some dabbling in the dark arts. In 2023, they were so hellbent on winning that they went on a massive 'signing spree'.

I call this their Import Era. They threw out their entire club ethos – 'show up for rides, improve each week, move up the club rankings and hopefully make the DC team' – and went straight to inviting top riders to race. They ended up with some EuroSteel riders in their team that year; but they went out too hard, and completely blew.

Last year they tried to game the system again, persuading guys like Marc Pritzen to join them. In fact, it's a bit embarrassing that 'Pure' Savage – even with riders like Pritzen, Gustav Basson, Felix Stehli and Kyle Mitchell in their midst – *didn't* win the Kings of the Atlantic Seaboard in '24. They had big ambitions for the 2024 DC; but on the day, they just couldn't beat Mother's 'superior tactics'.

Savage really go all out to win – it's life or death, for some of their riders. I know of a few who *only* train for the DC, expend all their physical and emotional

energy on the event, then want to give up cycling completely afterwards. Another of their riders – admittedly a beast – does crazy diets a week before race day, cutting out carbs or eating only fats; and then totally blows at the DC. This race makes guys do weird things.

There was also the infamous 'dossier leak' that showed how seriously Savage takes the race. They created a confidential PDF for their DC group ('Red Team Empties the Tank') that broke the race down into sectors and segments, with individual tactics for when certain riders should attack or go flat out. Cape Town being the size of a fishbowl, the PDF was leaked immediately, bringing much joy to the other teams.

Rumour has it that this year, the Savage riders received calendar invites for training rides and training camps. Special tips were sent to certain riders looking a bit past their prime… Allegedly they have a helmet sponsor on board, and some of the riders are not even taking milk with their coffee in order to shed a few kilograms. I heard the programme is called 'Project 25'. It's pretty focused!

WILL THEY, WON'T THEY?

Apparently, the Mother guys aren't riding DC this year. Well, their spokesman, Jared Kieser, has *said* they're not riding; but I think that's… bullshit, quite honestly. They're either assembling the most badass team ever, or they're going to lean into that ride-for-vibes thing (the racing equivalent of oat milk) and bring a 12-person crew to get some lame Charles Milner award.

> **"THEIR BEST SCAM WAS RECRUITING JASPER STUYVEN – YES, THE WINNER OF THE 2021 MILAN-SAN REMO! IT DIDN'T HELP – THEY STILL COULDN'T WIN."**

See, the Mother guys may be the unofficial Kings of the Atlantic Seaboard, but they're the official kings of banter. At the moment, they're peddling a nonsense message – something about 'quitting while we're at the top' – which the rest of us find hard to believe. To me, they're a bit like a Guy Ritchie movie – you never know what's going to happen next.

It's hard to gauge what LPC is up to this year – they're too old to figure out how WhatsApp works, so you never get any leaks from the group.

They like to think they've modernised, but they're just too far behind the pack when it comes to tech. I was talking to one of their riders recently, and he happily showed me that the team *does* have a WhatsApp group – I didn't have the heart to tell him he was showing me a note on iMessage. And their Instagram account has a whopping four posts, the last one uploaded in November 2024…

But while not exactly tech-savvy, LPC do have deep pockets, and they've also been known to employ some underhand tactics when it comes to rider recruitment. They once enticed top cycling coach Reece McDonald to race for them (bringing the club's average age down by about 10 years); but their best scam was recruiting Jasper Stuyven – yes, the winner of the 2021 Milan-San Remo! (It didn't help – they still couldn't win.)

The thing with LPC, though, is that they're always… simmering. They pretend they're not interested, but they're always out there, training hard. They train hard, and they ride hard. I think that's why they always blow; because really, they have only one riding and racing philosophy – they just murder each other.

Still, no matter what happens, they always have their honour. They go balls to the wall, and never make excuses; for aloof, larney okes, they're not too bad.

After the DC last year, a lot of teams were out partying in Swellendam. Some guys sent the LPC team a tray of tequilas, along with a page of their team's autographs. LPC sent back a serviette with a message, asking if that team was able to afford the drinks. So LPC are not like Mother, who are so Capetonian they only socialise with each other.

TOO CLOSE TO CALL

It's impossible to call a winner this year. We're uncertain of Mother's participation. Café Racers – pretenders at the best of times – won't feature. I stand by ECC being a bike shop rather than an actual team; I don't recognise their claims to legitimacy.

Savage? Anything could happen. From my intel, they're behind the fitness curve. When it comes to accommodation, they also have the worst race prep of all the teams. One year, their riders slept on the floor of a barn, an hour's drive from the start!

LPC look solid right now. Plus, they'll roll off their yachts and straight to the start in their tour bus. They might be the bookies' favourite… ■

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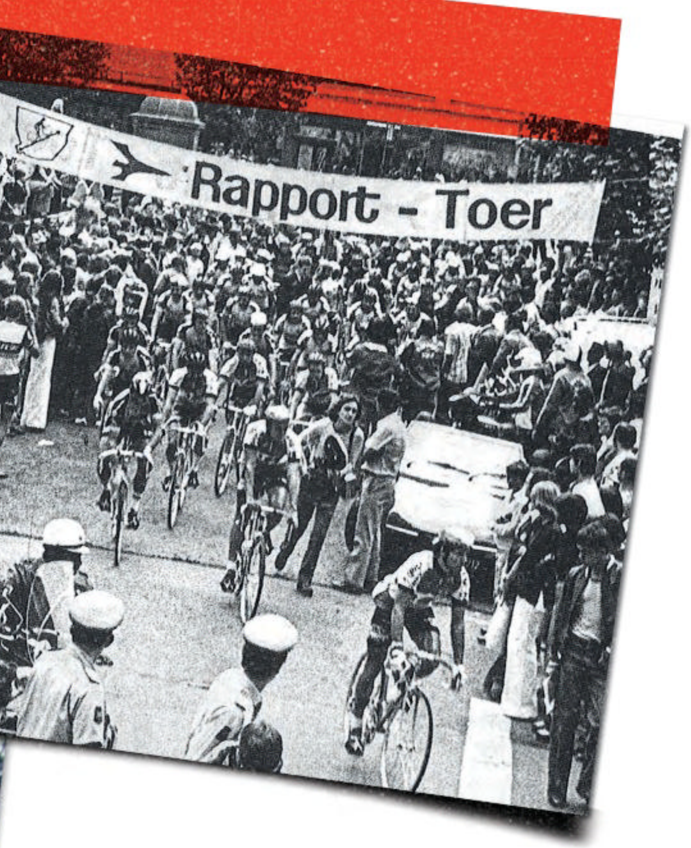
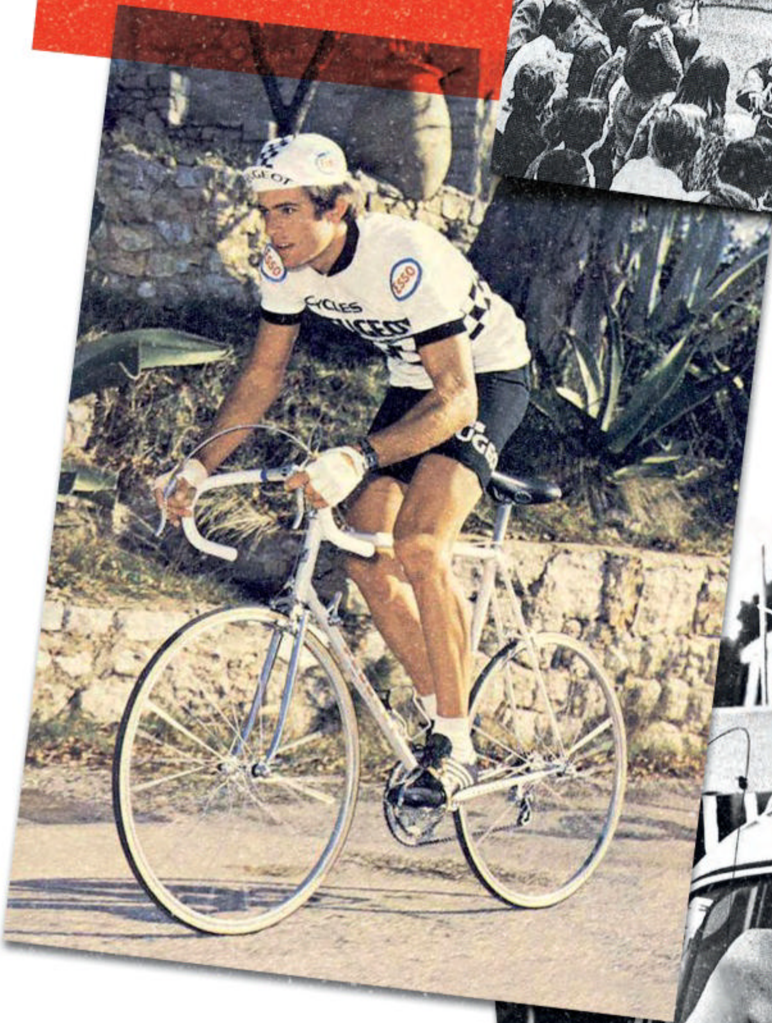
VAN HEERDEN VS. MCINTOSH

THE GREAT RIVALRY

During the 1980s and '90s, the Rapport Tour was one of South Africa's most prestigious cycling events - attracting the best local talent, and later some of the best riders in the rest of the world too. But for most of it, the rivalry between two riders dominated the roads and headlines…


Rapport - Toer



Holiday Inn
Rapport Toer
Holiday Inn

The Rapport Tour was the backdrop as Alan van Heerden (above) and Robbie McIntosh (right) battled like gladiators.

By Colin Hoffmann and Chris Willemse

LAPPE LAUBSCHER, NOTORIOUS EX-*RAPPORT* JOURNALIST, said after Robbie McIntosh's first victory in 1977 in the Rapport Tour that the Natal rider had been lucky to win.

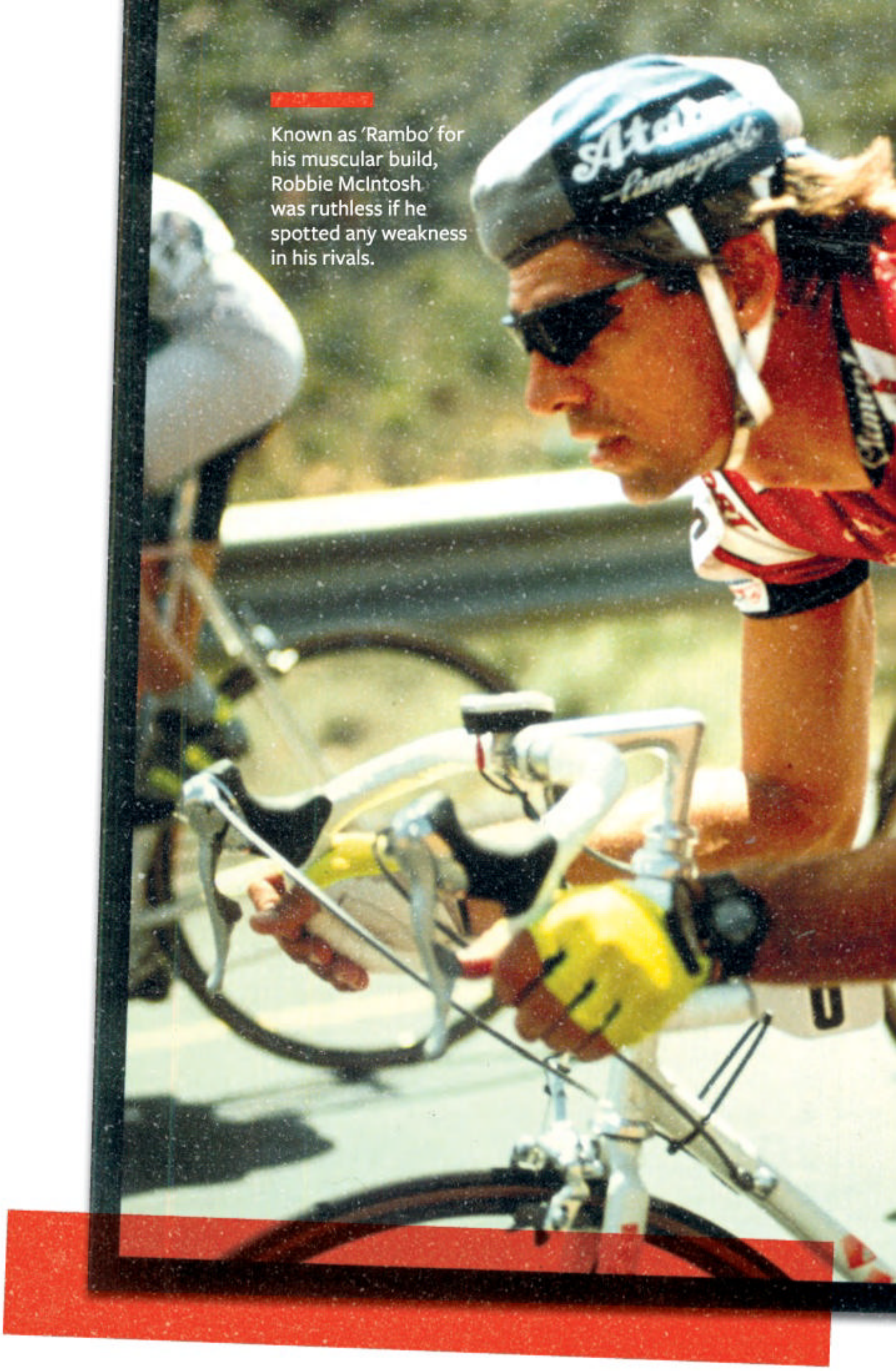
He based his argument on the fact that no Portuguese team participated in that 1977 event. But he had to swallow his words several years later when McIntosh won again in 1981, 1983 and 1986, proving himself a strategist par excellence and the most successful rider the event ever produced.

McIntosh was also an excellent leader and team man, and he was instrumental to proceedings when two of his teammates – Ertjies Bezuidenhout in 1984, and Lourens Smith in 1989 – also occupied the top step of the podium. With that first victory at the age of 24, he showed that he had the necessary qualities to ensure that through hard work, he could reap the rewards in the end.

In his preparation for the Rapport Tour he was often found on the hilly roads around his home town of Pietermaritzburg, training hard, as late as 11pm; with only a faint light powered by a dynamo on the front wheel for company. The next morning, at 6am, he would be back at his post in the workshop where he practised his profession as a diesel mechanic, only venturing onto the roads again after 5pm.

There was never any shortage of drive and perseverance with McIntosh, and due to a speech impediment, he chose to let his bike do the talking. He was a strong devil, tough as nails, and he made himself known specifically on difficult stages. Wind and rain didn't bother him; and at the start of a stage, while his opponents were still thinking about taking it easy when the weather didn't cooperate, he would go on the attack – much to the annoyance of those opponents. When things started to get tough, he always had a plan.

McIntosh wasn't the best sprinter, but his ability as an individual time-trial rider, and his tenacity in the mountains and under difficult conditions, gave him an edge that was especially advantageous in multi-day races.


Known as 'Rambo' for his muscular build, Robbie McIntosh was ruthless if he spotted any weakness in his rivals.

The Idol

■ On the other side of the spectrum, Alan van Heerden – McIntosh's contemporary, and the crown prince of South African cycling – had to wait a long time before he achieved his first victory in the Rapport Tour, in 1982.

Until that point, he'd had to be satisfied with the consolation prize, as the winner of the points division. But he was also victorious in 1987. Van Heerden was always in the limelight; and with his direct approach and quick temper, he played right into the hands of the under-the-radar McIntosh.

Though Van Heerden played the media, it was McIntosh who impressed with his strategies, and with the cool way he summed up races when it mattered. But like Willie Engelbrecht in later years, Van Heerden had everything a top cyclist needed. Both of them had 'big engines', and could climb with the best. They were best in sprints, most of the time, and time trials did not deter them in any way. They had no shortage of versatility.

Even on the track, both Van Heerden and Engelbrecht asserted themselves

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> Van Heerden was always in the limelight; and with his direct approach and quick temper, he played right into the hands of the under-the-radar McIntosh.

thoroughly. However, Van Heerden had one major shortcoming: his individualism. He was well known for not taking criticism particularly well, and his hot temper caused problems within his teams. It was no wonder that he had to wait so long for a first victory in the Rapport Tour.

'The Idol', as he was widely known, also did not hesitate to throw his toys around in the heat of battle; and this sometimes cost him dearly. For example, with Eddie King as his manager for the Solly Kramer team, Van Heerden lost his cool during a long stage through the Karoo after he suffered a flat tyre. The service vehicle took too long to get to him with a spare wheel; and with the bunch riding off into the distance, a fuming Van Heerden grabbed the front wheel and hurled it into the bushes.

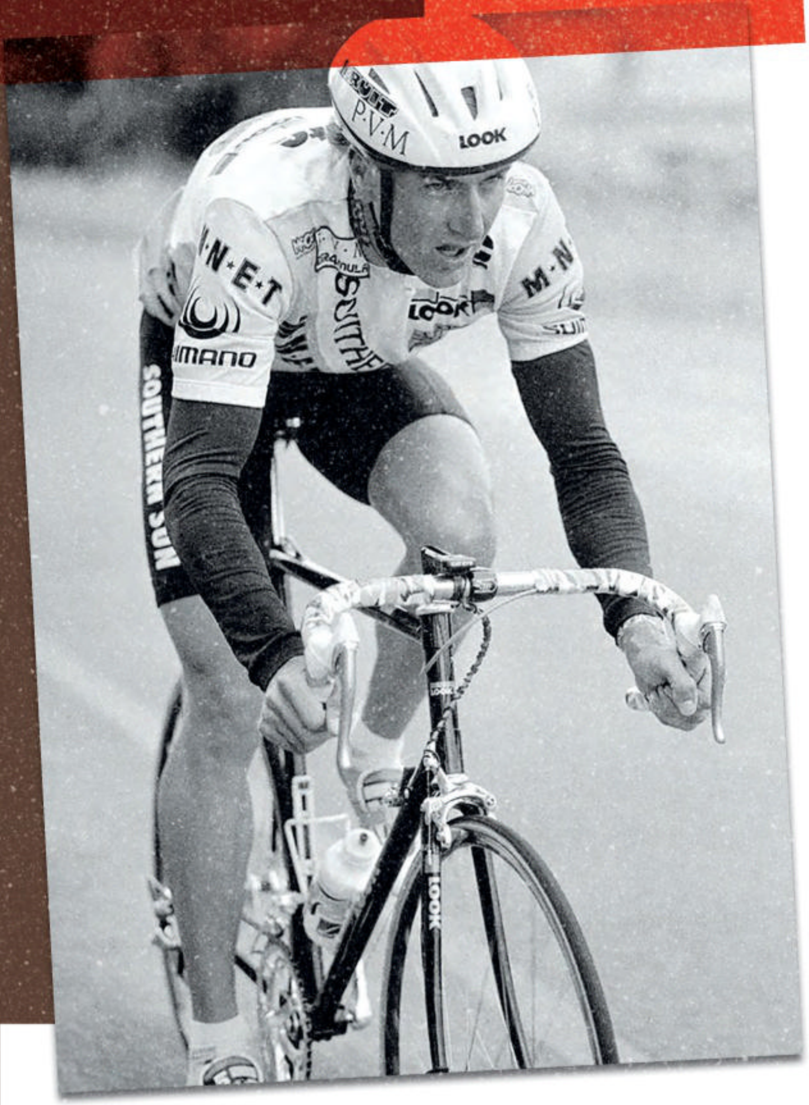
King calmly got out of the service vehicle, walked to the wheel, picked it up – and promptly threw it further into the bushes, before walking back to the service vehicle. In the end, Van Heerden had to collect the wheel himself, before King would assist him!

On another occasion, an altercation between him and Portuguese rider Antonio Fernandes set tongues wagging. During a stage of a race, on the way to Welkom, tensions developed between the two. Fingers were pointed in both directions, on and off the bike.

Fernandes never made a secret of the fact that he considered himself competent enough to challenge Van Heerden in a sprint. And so it was, in the sprint to the mining town that day.

As the stage neared its end, the jostling for position among the sprint teams and riders was intense; Van Heerden and Fernandes often found themselves fighting for the same position. As the stage finished, Van Heerden jumped off – almost before his bike had even stopped – and charged at Fernandes, before bystanders managed to pull the two rivals apart.

The late Willie Engelbrecht was one of McIntosh's victims in the 1989 Rapport Tour.



As a cyclist, however, Van Heerden was extremely neat and particular. Most cyclists would blow their noses like rugby players on a field, but Van Heerden always had a handkerchief handy. When the necessary had to be done, he moved to the back of the bunch, took his handkerchief out of his pocket, did the deed and then put his handkerchief back in his pocket.

With two such strong personalities in one team, it was inevitable that things would start to go haywire one way or another. And that's precisely what happened in 1981, when McIntosh and Van Heerden lined up for the Aticon Construction team at the Rapport Tour. The result was a first place for McIntosh, and a second place – along with another points jersey – for Van Heerden.

But that coveted yellow jersey of the overall leader at the end of the tour kept eluding 'The Idol', while McIntosh ('Rambo', or 'The Animal') already boasted two titles to his name.

The break between the two great spirits was unavoidable; but overall, it was beneficial for South African cycling. Each of the pair took over their own team in the years that followed, contributing a lot to the sport's rapid development. Many a rider wanted to be in a team with one or the other of them, which brought about healthy competition.

No Christmas Cards

■ In the early years, with McIntosh and Van Heerden within earshot of each other, there was quite a bit of tension between the two. There were certainly no Christmas cards exchanged, at first. But things cooled down as the years went on.

In 1989, in the twilight of their respective careers, they teamed up to help Lourens Smith secure his victory in the Rapport Tour against a rampant Italian team, who threw everything into the battle to win and 'steal' the last stage.

Traditionally, the last stage is seen as just a 'procession' for the GC contenders, while still a chance for the sprinters to get a final turn in the limelight. With just a few seconds separating Smith from the best-placed Italian on the stage – and quite a few bonus seconds at stake, in the last bonus primes – McIntosh, along with Andrew McLean, attacked the foreigners, trying to block them from adding bonus seconds.

Van Heerden controlled things in the bunch and took Smith under his wing. There was even talk of some hot slaps being handed out (everything was denied, of course!), but the long-standing battle axe between Van Heerden and McIntosh had clearly been buried. Ironically, Smith took his victory with the smallest of gaps: just eight seconds.

Attack after attack

■ Despite their sometimes strained relationship, there was mutual respect between McIntosh and Van Heerden.

Certain subjects could be referred to mockingly during a stage or a race, but they both knew when to keep quiet. McIntosh had been teased a lot about his stutter, but it was one thing he never bothered himself about. No one could imitate his razor-sharp summaries of situations on the road; and his reputation as a team player was one of his strongest attributes.

After McIntosh was crowned king of the Rapport Tour for the third time, in 1983, he made no secret of his desire to defend the title in 1984. He knew it would be a daunting task, because the previous year's winner is always marked closely.

With the first week's stages behind them, McIntosh and his Realtime Computers team came up with a strategy on Monday morning, on the stage between Durban and Greytown. On quite a few climbs, McIntosh would occasionally launch an attack, but each was soon neutralised by some of the other contenders. Everyone was nervous, and didn't give him any space. However, he continued; and slowly drained his opponents' strength.

A final solid attack had the desired effect: he tore the pack to shreds. And with the other contenders looking resigned to McIntosh's continued pressure, the next part of the plan was put into action: Bezuidenhout launched *his* attack. McIntosh was still playing around on the right-hand side of the road; so Bezuidenhout moved from his shadow, and struck hard on the left. No one had the strength to go along, and he rode himself into the yellow jersey more than four minutes ahead on the GC.

McIntosh still had enough strength to neutralise any attacks after Bezuidenhout's surge, but the attack had hurt Bezuidenhout – something that became clear on the road to Ladysmith the next day. With Van Heerden (who won the stage) in combative mood, it soon became clear that Bezuidenhout was in trouble, and the yellow jersey beckoned for Van Heerden.

McIntosh wanted nothing to do with it. In difficult weather conditions, he grabbed Bezuidenhout's bike by the saddle and pushed the exhausted Bezuidenhout the last 20km into town. The effort ensured that the yellow jersey remained with McIntosh's team, and was successfully worn all the way to the finish in Johannesburg.

Ruthless

Willie Engelbrecht's dramatic collapse on the penultimate stage in 1989, when Lourens Smith took the yellow jersey, was a clear example of McIntosh's ruthless instinct to destroy his opponents even if it meant giving up the win himself.

Engelbrecht had always struggled with his chest and his breathing in bad weather; and the weather did not cooperate that particular cold and wet Friday morning. With a newspaper pressed to the front of his chest, along with a rain jacket and gloves, Engelbrecht was in a difficult position from the start of the Worcester stage. It soon became evident that McIntosh had taken note of Engelbrecht's discomfort as the bunch rolled out of the Boland town…

By contrast, 'Rambo' McIntosh looked like he was on a Sunday afternoon outing. Wearing nothing more than his standard cycling kit, with torn-off sleeves, he was full of beans. Both he and Smith were well-placed to finish first overall; but Smith was second, and closer in time to the overall leader's jersey.

McIntosh took it upon himself to do the softening work, with Smith also taking a stab now and then. And Engelbrecht had to chase – every time. Eventually, Engelbrecht just couldn't plug all the holes anymore. His teammates were also unable to assist; they'd spent days neutralising one attack after another.

The yellow jersey weighed heavily, and with each revolution of the pedals, that weight became more and more oppressive. Eventually, Engelbrecht had to defend the jersey on his own – the other teams wouldn't help.

McIntosh was like a predator on the hunt. When Engelbrecht's rain jacket came off, it was clear he was getting closer to the abyss. When the gloves came off, pieces of newspaper and plastic appeared out of nowhere and were thrown to the side of the road. It was inevitable: one of the most dramatic moments in Rapport Tour history was about to unfold.

Engelbrecht dug deep, but couldn't sustain the effort. Eventually he wobbled to the left side of the road and literally fell off his bike, in tears. His tour was over. The yellow jersey of the overall leader had found a new boss, and Engelbrecht had to wait another year before he could finally be crowned the king of the Rapport Tour.

And McIntosh? True to his nature, his first words – spoken with a wry smile, as he finished the stage – were: "I killed the bastard!"

The next day he went back into service for tour rookie Smith, who went on to take the overall win.

Argus glory

In summary: the rivalry between Van Heerden and McIntosh, especially in the Rapport Tour, produced several highlights every year. As soon as the tours started to get longer, McIntosh proved to be an excellent rider. His ability to accurately assess race situations and help his teammates win the GC in stage races made him a great asset to any team.

Van Heerden's individualism probably counted against him in multi-day races; but he and Engelbrecht were both formidable one-day riders. Van Heerden won more than a thousand individual races in his career, as did Engelbrecht. Of these, Van Heerden achieved 66 stage victories in the Rapport Tour alone. He even won the climber's competition, despite not being built for inclines…

Interestingly, however, Van Heerden could never win what was then the Argus Cycle Tour (now the Cape Town Cycle Tour) – a race that should have suited his abilities. Engelbrecht achieved the most victories there, with five, while McIntosh won twice. The first time was in 1983; and in 1991 he set a new course record, when he completed the 105km in 2:28.46.

Engelbrecht improved the record three years later, before the Swede Micheal Andersson broke it the following year, in 2:22.56. Only Andersson, Engelbrecht and then Robert Hunter in 2008 – South Africa's first winner of a Tour de France stage, in 2007 – have recorded faster times than McIntosh.

Alan van Heerden died on 15 December 2009 at the age of 56, after a car accident. Robbie McIntosh is still actively involved in cycling and coaching.

A BRIEF LOOK INTO THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN CYCLING
R395

This is an edited excerpt from *A Brief Look Into The History of South African Cycling* by Colin Hoffmann and Chris Willemse. To order a copy (R395 plus R70 courier fee), contact Colin (colin@haveabreak.co.za; 063 984 9874) or Chris (chrissnr@global6.co.za; 083 640 4823).

HOW TO RIDE FASTER

RIDING FASTER IS NOT JUST ABOUT FITNESS AND STRENGTH. MASTERING THE ART OF PEDALLING, CORNERING AND CLIMBING CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO YOUR SPEED.

BY *BICYCLING* EDITORS

PEDALLING FAST IS ONE THING, BUT LEARNING TO CORNER AND DESCEND EFFICIENTLY IS JUST AS IMPORTANT.

Trevor Raab

►► EVERYONE'S IDEAL CADENCE IS DIFFERENT. FIND YOURS, THEN MAXIMISE IT.

DIAL IN YOUR PEDAL REVS

MASTER CADENCE, AND YOU'LL BE A SPEEDIER CYCLIST.

BY KRISTEN WAGNER

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT BOOSTING YOUR SPEED on the bike, cadence is probably one of the first things that comes to mind. And that's a good thing; because while it's not the only factor, it's a key component.

Cadence refers to the rate at which you pedal, and is measured in revolutions per minute (RPM). You may look at riders next to you and feel like you're pedalling too slowly or too fast, but the truth is, your ideal cadence is personal to you.

The first step is learning to be aware of your current cadence, so that you can practise maximising it in order to reach your ideal cadence. Achieving ideal cadence will help you sidestep fatigue and control your power output, so that you can hit the cycling speeds you dream about.

Jen Whalen, pro cyclist and host of *Bicycling* US's 'How to Ride Faster' programme, is here to walk you through it so you can ride with confidence.

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR CADENCE

►► You can use a bike computer, or you can calculate your cadence yourself by finding your RPM:

Set your timer or stopwatch to 30 seconds, and count the number of times one leg pushes down on the pedal.

Then, multiply that number by two. For example, if you push down 35 times in 30 seconds, that's 70rpm.

Alternatively, you can do the same exercise for 10 seconds and multiply that number by six. Once you know your RPMs, you can figure out your ideal cadence.

WHAT'S THE IDEAL CADENCE?

►► According to research, most riders should aim for 80-90rpm. But once you've calculated your cadence, you can get specific about your individual cadence goals. What you decide all depends on your fitness and muscle type.

Fast-twitch muscle fibres are responsible for faster, more powerful movements like sprints; while slow-twitch muscle fibres are responsible for slower, sustained movements like long rides.

We all have fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscle fibres, but understanding which you have more of will help you find where you thrive in terms of cadence and speed. Slow-twitch riders usually do well at higher cadences, whereas fast-twitch riders might prefer lower ranges.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CADENCE TRAINING? ►► By lowering your muscular fatigue and working the cardiovascular system, higher cadence work increases your efficiency on the bike and helps you ride longer.

"It's not mashing the pedals. It's learning how to pedal efficiently," says David Lipscomb, founder and head coach of CIS Training Systems LLC, with over 30 years of performance and coaching expertise. "So, utilise force development training as a critical step to get faster on the bike, as it relates to speed and orange-zone training."

SIX THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND ▶▶ Before you dive headfirst into cadence work, there are a few things to be aware of:

1 ■ If you stay in one gear all the time, consider shifting to an easier gear. Make your practice a little easier!

2 ■ One high-cadence workout per week is plenty when you're looking to improve your cadence. Simply swap an easier endurance ride for a cadence workout, keeping your power/heart rate in the endurance zone as you speed up your pedalling.

3 ■ Cadence work doesn't have to be your entire ride. It's easy to add cadence drills to any longer ride. Or, cadence drills can be your warm-up. To practise low-cadence work, simply drop your cadence during the climbs on your endurance rides.

4 ■ Most importantly, don't expect changes overnight. As with any progression, you should focus on incremental changes over practice sessions.

5 ■ Remember: the goal is to pedal faster while maintaining the same power/speed output.

6 ■ Focus on your form while doing these drills. Over time, things will smooth out with your pedal stroke and how you feel overall.

◀◀ INTEGRATE CADENCE WORK INTO YOUR NORMAL RIDING ROUTINE. DO THE DRILLS AS A WARM-UP, OR ON CLIMBS.

THE DRILL ▶▶ Here's one of *Bicycling's* most popular cadence drills. The goal of this drill is to develop cadence transitions, leading to a smooth pedal stroke, and to maintain the same resistance at different cadences.

- **Find the gear** you need to be in to get to 65% of your maximum heart rate, or an RPE (rate of perceived exertion) of about 6 out of 10. Don't change your resistance during this drill.
- **Warm up** with 1 minute at 85rpm, followed by 30 seconds at 95rpm, then back to 30 seconds at 85rpm.
- **Repeat** the 30-second intervals a total of 5 times.
- **Do 1 minute** at 95rpm, followed by 30 seconds at 105rpm, then back to 30 seconds at 95rpm.
- **Repeat** these 30-second intervals a total of 5 times.

Images: Trevor Raab

MASTER YOUR TECHNIQUE

EXPERT TIPS ON CORNERING & CLIMBING (AND DESCENDING) THAT MAKE YOU A FASTER RIDER, WHETHER YOU'RE ON A ROAD BIKE OR A MOUNTAIN BIKE.

BY BRIAN DALEK

WHEN IT COMES TO RIDING FASTER, it's easy to think the smartest way to get there is to ride hard all the time by doing endless speed sessions. That will help; but it will only get you so far, if you don't have the basics dialled in with your riding technique.

Because what's the benefit in gaining speed if you have to slow down on every sharp turn? Or if every technical mountain-bike descent brings you dread? Or you're left in the dust on the group gravel ride at the base of the first significant hill?

KEY CORNERING TECHNIQUES

Cornering isn't just turning – it's an important skill requiring good use of body position, braking control, line choice and terrain awareness, whether you're riding on the road or the trail. The more you practise, the more confident you'll be. Mastering this skill will make each ride more enjoyable, and safer overall.

▸▸ LEARN TO APPLY GENTLE PRESSURE ON THE OUTSIDE FOOT AS YOU CORNER, FOR EXTRA TRACTION.

◀◀ YOUR BIKE FOLLOWS YOUR EYES. DON'T LOOK AT YOUR FRONT WHEEL, LOOK AT A POINT A LITTLE FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD OR TRAIL.

BRAKE BEFORE THE TURN ▶▶ On the road, braking mid-turn increases the risk of skidding and crashing. Use both front and rear brakes *before* entering the corner, especially on descents or wet surfaces. Practice feathering the brakes (light, quick taps) instead of squeezing them hard.

LOOK WHERE YOU WANT TO GO
▶▶ Your bike naturally follows your eyes. Direct your gaze *through* the turn, not down at your wheel. This is especially critical on technical climbs with switchbacks. If you're riding a mountain bike, focusing on a point two to three metres ahead of your front wheel will help give you time to find the right line. Practise moving your gaze up and down the path ahead. Your body will follow.

SHIFT YOUR WEIGHT AND LEAN THE BIKE
▶▶ On the road, heading into a corner on a descent, get into the drops for better front-wheel pressure. Bend your elbows, keep the inside pedal up and the outside pedal down. Tilt the bike, not your body, and counter-steer by gently pushing with the inside hand. Press into the outside foot and hand to maintain traction on the tar.

On the mountain bike, similar principles apply. But instead of being in the drops, bend your arms to keep your centre of gravity low. This will help keep you stable and planted.

AIM YOUR LINE FOR THE INSIDE OF THE TURN ▶▶ On the road, follow an 'outside-inside-outside' line. This is essential for reducing your turning radius and preserving speed.

Enter the turn wide, go into the apex tight, and exit wide (without crossing the centre line).

> "WHAT'S THE BENEFIT IN GAINING SPEED IF YOU HAVE TO SLOW DOWN ON EVERY SHARP TURN?"

Images: Axel Brunst / Unsplash; Trevor Raab

TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER CLIMBING

Very few cyclists are great at pedalling fast uphill from the jump. But developing this skill will definitely provide better pacing, less fatigue and less strain. The more you seek out different elevation profiles, the better. You can use apps or local club suggestions to vary your climbing terrain.

HANDLEBAR POSITION AND BREATHING
▶▶ On the road, stay on the hoods or the tops of your handlebar. If you climb in the drops, you restrict your breathing. Also, keep your upper body relaxed, as any extra tension will lead to wasted energy.

STAY SEATED WHEN POSSIBLE
▶▶ Climbing while seated is more efficient, especially on long or moderate ascents.

MASTER YOUR PACING ▶▶ Break the climb into thirds for more consistent power and better finishes. (Most modern GPS head units have a function that shows the climb on the screen, for easy reference.)

Go easy for the first third, moderate for the second third, and hard for the final third. This will prevent you overcooking the initial ascent and fading near the end of the climb. ***B***

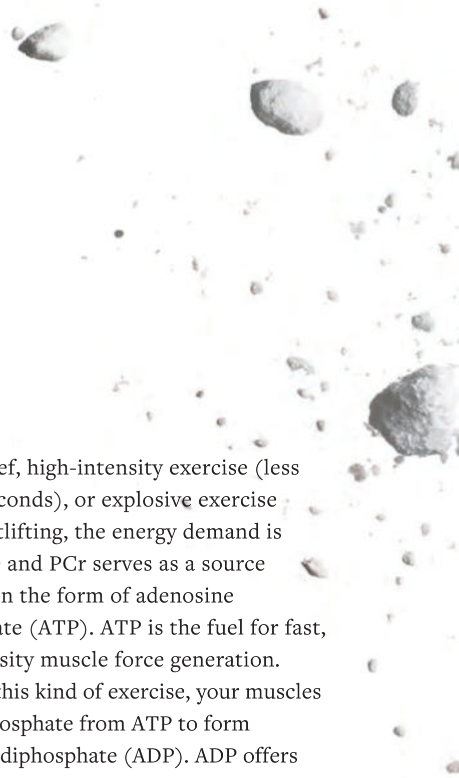
CAN CREATINE MAKE YOU FASTER?

CREATINE HAS RECEIVED LOTS OF ATTENTION AS A MUSCLE-BUILDING AID, BUT IS THERE ANY BENEFIT TO CYCLISTS? **HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW.**

▶ Research suggests that using a creatine supplement, in conjuction with specific weight-bearing training, can improve your speed during high-intensity efforts.

BY MATTHEW KADEY, SPORTS DIETITIAN
REVIEWED BY NAMRITA BROOKE, PHD, DIETITIAN & NUTRITION ADVISOR

Trevor Raab



Wanting to ride faster and stronger is pretty much a universal phenomenon among cyclists, and nutrition is a vital part of accomplishing that. The conversation around this often involves nutritional supplements; which of them are actually worth taking, and which are a waste of time and money? There's no shortage of dubious marketing claims about various supplements out there, many of which aren't regulated. In some cases, research is still in the early stages and a particular supplement hasn't been thoroughly studied yet.

Creatine doesn't fall into that category – it's been widely studied as a potential performance enhancer. In 2023, an article published in the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition* found that there's a growing body of research that supports the use of creatine supplementation to improve endurance. As such, it's a popular supplement choice among professional athletes and weekend warriors alike, yet it's surrounded by confusion and misinformation. Will it give you chiselled abs? Is it safe to use every day?

Here's everything you need to know about the benefits of creatine supplements (and the downsides), to help you figure out if it's the right supplement for you.

CREATINE, DEFINED

Our bodies make the substance known as creatine from three amino acids: L-arginine, glycine, and L-methionine. It's primarily produced in the liver, and to a lesser extent in the pancreas and kidneys. On the whole, most humans will naturally produce about 1 gram of creatine per day.

On top of this, you can also get creatine from your diet when you consume animal-based foods like red meat, poultry or seafood. (Herring seems to be the creatine heavyweight!) Plant-based foods like grains and beans are largely devoid of creatine. Note that most creatine supplements are vegan – surprisingly – because they're typically made using synthetic ingredients.

Once you produce it or eat it at dinner, creatine is mostly stored in skeletal muscles, with small amounts stashed away in organs like the liver, kidneys and brain.

HOW CREATINE WORKS IN THE BODY

Creatine is primarily stored as phosphocreatine (PCr) in skeletal muscles. When you do brief, high-intensity exercise (less than 10 seconds), or explosive exercise like weightlifting, the energy demand is immediate and PCr serves as a source of energy in the form of adenosine triphosphate (ATP). ATP is the fuel for fast, high-intensity muscle force generation.

During this kind of exercise, your muscles remove phosphate from ATP to form adenosine diphosphate (ADP). ADP offers no energy, so your body uses PCr to supply a phosphate molecule to rapidly regenerate ATP from ADP, to once again be used as a source of power for a high-intensity effort.

Put simply, if you increase the supply of creatine via supplementation, theoretically you should have more PCr available to convert ADP to ATP, and thus have more energy to do more repeated, high-intensity efforts. One research review in the journal *Nutrients* confirmed this – creatine use can help increase muscle mass via resistance training, by giving you more energy to squeeze out a few more reps and therefore build more muscle.

The flip side is also true: simply taking creatine will do nothing for your muscles unless you also train at a vigorous effort.

It's worth noting that some creatine research is focusing on the potential benefits (in combination with resistance training) for helping older adults slow down the muscle loss that accompanies aging. Creatine is also believed to help buffer the build-up of acid

▶ Creatine supplements abound. To be on the safe side, choose one that has been verified by a trusted third party. Read the label, and don't just buy on price.

Getty Images

in muscle cells, because the breakdown of PCr uses up a hydrogen atom. This can certainly also improve exercise tolerance during all-out efforts.

WHAT ABOUT CYCLING?

As for outside the weight room, a research review published in the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition* says it's time for endurance athletes to consider making room for creatine in their supplement routine, too.

The paper's authors argue that it's not uncommon for endurance athletes – including cyclists – to experience "key race-defining moments", where a little extra creatine at their disposal could make a difference for intense efforts like surges, hill climbs and sprints at the finish. The study determined that creatine supplementation (along with electrolytes) improved anaerobic sprint performance (15-second max-effort sprints followed by two-minute recovery periods) in recreational male athletes.

Meanwhile, a 2018 Australian study put fit cyclists through a 120km time trial that was peppered with a series of 1km and 4km sprints. While creatine didn't improve their overall time, it did manage to boost their power in the final sprint efforts.

What's more: taking creatine along with carbohydrates seems to enhance glycogen storage in the muscles, which is the primary energy source for high-intensity aerobic exercise, and another way that the supplement could give cyclists a boost.

There's also a little bit of evidence from another study to suggest that creatine use before a big endurance workout – in this case a half-Ironman – can reduce exercise-induced muscle damage via a subdued inflammatory response, thereby allowing for quicker recovery. Sounds good; but we need more research to be done in this particular area.

With all that said, we also need more research conducted on endurance athletes in real-world settings in general before we can conclude that creatine is indeed helpful in improving certain performance metrics – and in exactly what scenarios cyclists would find the most benefit.

> **"IF YOUR TRAINING PROGRAMME OR THE RACES YOU ENTER INVOLVE SOME FORM OF EXPLOSIVE EXERCISE, IT'S A WORTHY SUPPLEMENT TO CONSIDER…"**

OTHER BENEFITS OF CREATINE

Although research has mostly focused on its use in exercise and sports performance, creatine may have additional health benefits; it might be good for your brain!

Research is still emerging – and we need much more of it before drawing strong conclusions – but a few small studies show that creatine supplementation may be useful for improving memory, particularly in older individuals, and during the healing process after a brain injury like a concussion.

Also, using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) in the USA, which involved more than 22 000 people, researchers were able to examine a possible relationship between creatine and depression in an adult cohort. The data showed that people with lower reported intakes of creatine were more likely to suffer from depression – something that seemed to be more prevalent in women than men. But again, there's a dearth of data to show that taking creatine can noticeably boost your mood, so take this with a pinch of salt for now.

As for the potential health benefits for bone strength, heart disease, inflammation and more, there just isn't anything close to definite research to support creatine use for these purposes.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

There are some, but thankfully they're relatively minor. Decades of research has shown that creatine monohydrate (the full name of the supplement) is safe for most people to use. The International Society of Sports Nutrition says intake levels of up to

HOW MUCH SHOULD I TAKE?

You can quickly max out your creatine levels in about a week, by taking 20g per day (split into 5g four times a day) for about five to seven days.

After that, switch to a 'maintenance load phase' of 3–5g per day. You can also skip the loading phase outright and just do the 3–5g dose, in which case it will take about four weeks to reach peak saturation in your muscles.

Think of your muscles as a sponge and creatine like water; you can saturate the sponge by running water from the tap quickly or slowly, but over time the end result is still the same. The loading phase just gets you to the same place a bit quicker. The slower approach may be less likely to cause digestive side-effects, but it requires some forethought if you're using creatine to give you a boost for a specific event or race.

Once your creatine levels are up to saturation, if you stop taking it, it will take about a month for your body to drift back down to your baseline level. That means, in theory, that you can 'cycle' your supplement use depending on your training or racing goals. (Disclaimer: this practice could use some more research to show its effectiveness.)

HOW DO I TAKE IT – AND WHEN?

Creatine supplements come in various forms, including capsules, powders, chewables, gummies and beverages. Powders are the most popular option because they're the most well-studied, most widely available, and the easiest to control when it comes to dosage.

There are plenty of creatine variants on the market, yet none to date have been shown to outperform the least expensive and most basic version, creatine monohydrate.

Creatine monohydrate is a tasteless powder that can easily be mixed into water, juice and smoothies. (The rise in popularity of creatine has caused a spike in creatine prices, so it's no longer the bargain supplement it used to be.)

Beware of so-called 'pre-workout' mixes that advertise creatine as an ingredient. A number of these may not contain the minimum effective amount (3–5g). Also remember that creatine is only useful if taken regularly. So, if you just use a pre-workout mix every now and then before a big effort, the creatine in that mix is likely to be of little use.

Ideally, you want to aim to take creatine close to your workout (right before or after). But generally, you can just take it at a time that works best for you. As long as you take it regularly, you stand a better chance of reaping the rewards.

Always choose a supplement tested by a trusted third party, like NSF Certified for Sport, or listed on the Informed Sport database – you can normally find details on the packaging. This way you have more confidence that you're getting a quality product.

Remember, supplements like creatine have less oversight than foods, so it's important to seek out options from reliable brands. Thorne Creatine Monohydrate has a very solid reputation if you can find it locally; otherwise check out Biogen's 'Pure Creatine' and Nutritech's 'ProSport Creatine Monohydrate'.

Creatine is not on the World Anti-Doping Agency's Prohibited List and is treated as a legal nutritional supplement. For athletes under 18, SAIDS (the South African Institute for Drug-Free Sport) recommends caution – the safety of the supplement when used by children and adolescents is less well established.

Always consult a health professional before you embark on a supplement regime.

▶ Creatine monohydrate is a tasteless powder that can easily be added to your bidon.

Getty Images

30g per day for up to five years run very little safety risk. It's advisable to avoid taking more than this amount, however, as the safety of creatine above this threshold is not known.

According to one review, weight gain is the most commonly reported side effect of using creatine, which is understandably of concern to riders who want to improve their power-to-weight ratio. On top of any muscle mass that creatine has helped you pack on, if you're lifting hard, the extra weight is also the result of intramuscular water retention. However, there's little evidence to suggest that his minor water weight is detrimental to performance. Interestingly, the extra water retention may actually help performance in hot conditions by improving thermoregulation.

Some people experience bloating and nausea when using creatine, which occurs more often when higher amounts are taken at once, or when the body is still getting used to the supplement. These symptoms should subside fairly quickly.

Although generally considered safe, creatine may not be right for everyone. There isn't enough scientific evidence to prove that it's safe for pregnant or breastfeeding women, for example, and it's not a wise supplement to use for anyone with kidney disease.

Another concern is that if you take it as a supplement, your body will stop producing it naturally. But again, there's no evidence to support this.

THE BOTTOM LINE

It would be very difficult to consume enough creatine from foods alone to give you the performance benefit shown in the research papers. Even among meat-eaters, creatine stores in your muscles are typically only around 60-80% of saturation at any given moment. Taking a supplement, however, can boost those stores by up to 20%.

Regarding the primary benefit of creatine for cyclists – fuelling an intense effort like sprinting up a punchy climb – it's certainly intriguing. But whether it's worth pursuing depends entirely on your cycling goals. Taking creatine will only help you to become a fitter athlete if you pair it with certain forms of exercise – namely short, intense bursts of activity. So, if your training programme or the races you enter involve some form of explosive exercise, it's a worthy supplement to consider, and might give you more than just marginal gains.

However, if you mostly do long, Zone 2 rides and very little gym work, you could give creatine a miss without being at a disadvantage.

As with all nutrition and supplementation, there's plenty of variation when it comes to the results achieved. There's a modicum of evidence that women have about 10% higher baseline intramuscular creatine levels, and thus get less performance benefit from taking it as a supplement; and because creatine is mostly found in animal-based foods, there's a call for more research to determine if vegan or vegetarian athletes may benefit the most from taking it as a supplement.

And finally, it's important to note that the benefits of supplements such as creatine will be marginal compared to what you experience by nailing the basics: your nutrition, training and sleep habits in general. In the end, creatine alone won't get you onto the podium; it's just one small part of the overall jigsaw puzzle. ***B***

► Filling your bottles with plain water is fine on shorter rides, or if you also plan to eat a bar or gel. For longer rides, use a sports drink mix that contains minerals and electrolytes.

HYDRATION IS A SKILL YOU CAN LEARN

Getty Images

EVERYONE ALWAYS GOES ON ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF DRINKING BEFORE YOU RIDE, WHILE YOU RIDE, AFTER YOU RIDE… BUT HOW MUCH FLUID DO YOU REALLY NEED?

BY MIRIAM VAN REIJEN

HOW MUCH SHOULD A CYCLIST DRINK? To be frank, we don't know. The amount of fluid you lose depends greatly on your fitness level, how well you're accustomed to riding in the heat, and simply on your individual rate of fluid loss. It's a highly personal thing.

One cyclist might sweat as little as 200ml per hour, while there are reports of athletes sweating more than 1.4 litres per hour! Plus, the concentration of sodium in the sweat we lose also varies enormously from person to person. The rule of thumb is to assume an average of around 1 000mg per litre, but it can range from half of that to more than 3 000mg per litre.

HYDRATION AND WEIGHT LOSS

You've probably learnt that you weigh less after exercise because of the fluid lost through sweating. If you're 2kg lighter after a training ride, you might assume you've lost 2 litres of body fluid. But recent research shows that this isn't entirely correct. The carbohydrates, proteins and fats in our bodies bind to water. When these nutrients are burned for energy during exercise, that bound water is also released. Your body can then use this fluid during the activity, effectively adding to your total body water. This means you don't need to drink quite as much to stay hydrated, and it also means that a 2% drop in body weight doesn't necessarily equal a 2% loss of body fluid.

Drinking too much, and finishing an event at the same weight you started, increases the risk of hyperhydration and hyponatraemia – a dangerous condition in which the concentration of sodium in the body falls too low because of excessive water intake. The risks of over-drinking are actually greater than those of drinking too little! Hyponatraemia causes your cells to swell; if this happens in the brain, it can lead to coma and even death.

A LITTLE DEHYDRATION IS NOT A PROBLEM

It's not a big deal if you take in slightly less fluid than you actually lose. The key is to replace your fluid (and weight) loss after training by a factor of 1.5. For example, if you've ridden for three hours, lost 2 400ml of fluid and drunk only 1 500ml, you should aim to drink around 2 100ml more in the hours after your ride. (2 400 × 1.5 = 3 600ml)

If you know how much fluid you typically lose, and how much you can carry with you, you can start hydrating before your training session. That 1.5x guideline refers to total fluid intake *around* your ride: a generous glass before you set off, one or two bottles on the road, and another big glass as soon as you get home.

As a general rule, you shouldn't lose more than 2% of your body weight in fluid. If you lose more without replacing it, your performance will decline. Here's why: when you lose a lot of fluid, the volume of blood plasma in your body drops and your blood effectively becomes thicker. To deliver enough oxygen and energy to your muscles, your heart has to work harder and the effort feels heavier. This is yet another reason to keep drinking. Adequate fluid intake after training also supports recovery.

NOT JUST WATER

Just as important as how much you drink is *what* you drink. Plain water is fine for rides of up to about 90 minutes. But if you plan to cycle for longer – especially if you're a heavy sweater – it's better to use a sports drink or water with added electrolytes. These help you replace sodium, potassium and magnesium, all of which are lost when you sweat heavily.

If you drink only large amounts of plain water during a long ride, you also risk hyponatraemia. This is when the blood plasma becomes diluted and the concentration of key minerals such as sodium and potassium drops too low.

HOW TO HYDRATE PROPERLY

As we've said, the amount you need to drink is extremely personal; but for most cyclists it's between 500 and 1 000ml per hour. If you know roughly how much fluid you lose, then you also know how much you need to drink per hour. That might sound like a lot to take in! These tips can help.

1

DRINK PLENTY BEFORE YOU START

Starting your ride well hydrated is very important, especially when it's hot – you need to make sure your body stays well hydrated throughout the day. Drink 500–750ml of water or sports drink in the hour before you set off. This way, you begin with a good fluid balance.

2

DRINK EVERY 15 MINUTES

Drink regularly, not just when you feel thirsty. As a guideline, it's useful to take a few large sips every 15–20 minutes. Research has shown that it's better to drink a slightly larger amount a few times than to take very small sips more frequently. Do you forget to drink? Make sure your cycling computer displays the time, so you can remind yourself to drink at the right moments. Some computers will even alert you when it's time to drink or eat.

3

DRINK IN COMBINATION WITH EATING

Train yourself to take a few large sips of water every time you eat something. In that case, a sports drink isn't necessary, as you're already taking in sugars and minerals in another way. If you have a bar or gel while riding, then follow it immediately with a drink from your bottle of water. This also helps with the absorption of the carbohydrates you've just eaten, ensuring you maintain enough energy.

4

PLAN YOUR LONG RIDES CAREFULLY

If you're going on a long ride, make sure you know where you can refill your bottles. This can be particularly challenging in new areas or on unfamiliar routes. In addition, take a sachet of sports drink or an electrolyte tablet with you, so that you don't have only water in the second part of your ride.

5

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE GOOD BOTTLES

This may sound like a strange tip, but some bottle are just plain awkward to use. It comes down to personal preference, but try to find a bottle that works for you, or choose a hydration pack for off-road rides. Make it as easy as possible to drink, so that the barrier to staying hydrated is as low as possible.

6

EXTRA FLUID THROUGH FOOD

If you're one of those struggle-to-drink-enough people, take a look at the food items on the following page. They all contain a lot of fluid – meaning you can get more than a third of the daily fluid you need just from your diet.

Trevor Raab

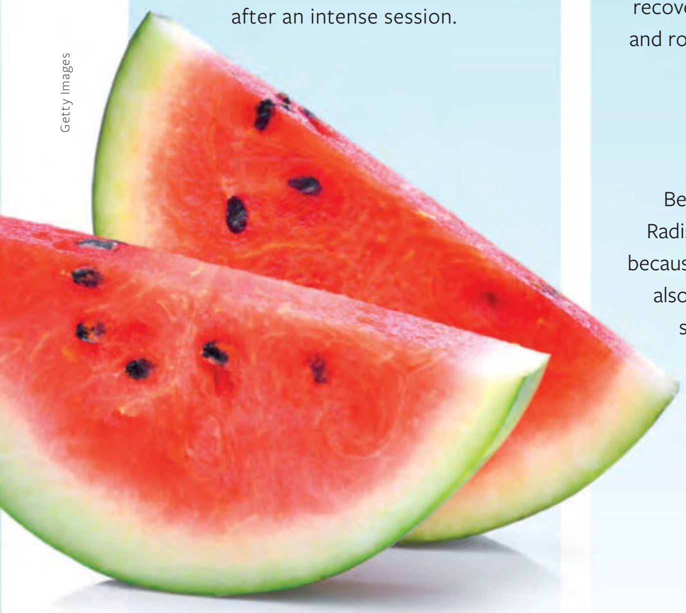
HIGH-FLUID FOODS

BANANAS

Bananas are about 74% water. In addition, they contain important electrolytes like potassium and magnesium, which help maintain a good fluid balance. Make a delicious smoothie with (frozen) banana, yoghurt and peanut butter: the ideal combination of protein, fluid, carbohydrates and a little healthy fat.

WATERMELON

Eating low-fibre vegetables and fruit with a high water content during your training is often more effective than drinking plain water. Watermelon is one of the best choices: it's made up of no less than 92% water, and is full of natural sugars – the perfect snack after an intense session.



Getty Images

SOUP

Bit of a no-brainer – soup is 90% water, and if yours also contains vegetables and protein, it becomes a good recovery meal. The sodium in soup also helps your body absorb the fluid more effectively. Our favourite: cold beetroot soup with a scoop of cottage cheese. The combination of beetroot and cottage cheese is excellent for muscle recovery.

SPINACH

Good hydration depends on electrolytes. Spinach is one of the best sources of magnesium, a mineral involved in more than 300 chemical reactions in the body. On top of that, spinach is over 92% water, making it ideal as part of a recovery meal. Serve it with baked fish and roast potatoes, or add a handful to your smoothie.

RADISHES

Bet you didn't think of this one! Radishes are not only refreshing because of their crisp taste; they're also 95% water – perfect for a summer salad. Also important for cyclists: these small red bulbs are packed with vitamin C, which is essential for muscle recovery.

ORANGES

Oranges are also full of vitamin C, but did you know they're 88% water and contain anti-inflammatory compounds? At many races, orange segments are offered along the route – munch a few for instant energy.

COURGETTE

If you eat 150g of courgettes, you'll have taken in about 35% of your daily recommended dose of vitamin C, along with a good amount of fibre and plenty of fluid. Courgettes are another winning ingredient in a post-ride smoothie; or you can make a light version of spaghetti by spiralling the vegetable and serving it with your favourite pasta sauce.

THE TEST ZONE

80 CHECKPOINT ALR
The alloy version of Trek's do-it-all gravel bike is heavy on features and light on your wallet.

84 1X ON THE ROAD
Seven good reasons to consider dropping the front derailleur on your road bike.

86 32-INCH MTB
Are even bigger wheels the next big thing in mountain biking?

88 GIFT GUIDE
Yup, Christmas is coming. Here's our pick of the best goodies for the cyclist in your life.

Images Supplied

Metal Still Rocks

The Trek Checkpoint ALR is a versatile, upgrade-friendly gravel bike that offers premium features at an attainable price.

Words **DAN CHABANOV**
Photography **TREVOR RAAB**

THE TREK CHECKPOINT ALR gets a lot right – far more than it gets wrong.

Yes, you can nitpick the stock wheels and tyres, or wish for the SL's downtube storage and IsoSpeed decoupler, but those trade-offs help keep the price in check while preserving what matters: confident handling, generous tyre clearance, real-world durability, and an upgrade-friendly platform.

The result is a thoroughly well-thought-out aluminium gravel bike that feels ready for anything from weekday groad rides to loaded weekend overnighters, or even that gravel race that's on your bucket list.

WHY IT'S COOL

■ Well, it brings plenty of gravel-bike capability, and makes that capability available to more riders. Tyre clearance has been increased to 50mm; there are abundant mounts; it's compatible with a dropper post and suspension... You can commute, ride for fun or gear up for a bikepacking trip, all on one platform.

The geometry is more accessible, with a higher stack and reduced reach, which will help more riders get comfortable without spacer towers or flipped stems. The carbon fork from the SL trickles down – to save weight, and to add some welcome vibration damping. It also features the useful three-pack mounts on each fork leg for bottles or cargo.

There are standard mounts all over the frame, clean hybrid cable routing for easier service, and space for large 750ml bottles (even with a half-frame bag) on every size.

Modern standards keep it future-friendly, too. UDH facilitates easy hanger replacement, or an upgrade to SRAM Transmission. The T47 BB is quiet, durable and compatible with all crank spindle standards.

▶ OPPOSITE PAGE: THE CHECKPOINT ALR 5 HAS A SRAM APEX XPLR 1X12 DRIVETRAIN, NEAT CABLE ROUTING AND MUCH MORE CLEARANCE THAN THE STOCK 42MM TYRES SUGGEST.

▼ IT MIGHT NOT HAVE AN ISOSPEED DECOUPLER LIKE ITS CARBON COUSIN, BUT THE CHECKPOINT ALR FRAME HAS JUST AS MANY MOUNTING AND BOTTLE BOSSES.

HOW DOES IT RIDE?

■ On dirt roads and smooth trails, the Checkpoint ALR is composed and versatile. The geometry tweaks (more stack, less reach, shorter front-centre, lower trail) place the rider in a confident, upright position without dulling the handling. It's stable when fast, manageable when slow, and ready for everything from singletrack to Karoo gravel.

The front end feels notably more cooperative at low speeds, especially on steep or technical climbs. The reduced trail and shorter front-centre cut down on front-wheel 'flop', making tight switchbacks and chunky climbs easier to navigate.

My local gravel loop consists of a few mellow gravel roads, a steep cobblestone climb, and a heap of singletrack. A bit of everything you can throw at a gravel bike. The Checkpoint ALR exceeded my expectations for it all.

On steep and loose jeep-track climbs, the front end stayed calm and predictable, with none of the wandering that can plague long, slack gravel bikes. On fast gravel roads, the bike also felt planted and easy to course-correct – even with a light crosswind and some corrugations. I never felt like I was fighting the bike to get it to do what I wanted. And it's that blend – manageable at a crawl, composed at speed – that defines the ALR's personality.

Overall comfort is about what you'd expect from an aluminium gravel bike with 42(ish)mm tyres. That's to say, totally fine. It's certainly not the most comfortable bike I've ever ridden, but I wouldn't say it's particularly harsh either.

For riders seeking enhanced comfort, upgrading to a wider set of tyres would provide significantly more real-world compliance and speed, compared to upgrading to a carbon frame.

THOUGHTS ON LONG-TERM DURABILITY AND SERVICEABILITY?

■ The 300 Series Alpha Aluminium frame, threaded T47 BB, and UDH give me confidence that the Checkpoint ALR is a frame that riders will be able to use, service and upgrade for many years. The stock build kit is solid and easily upgradable, too.

The only thing that gives me pause regarding long-term maintenance is the combination of mechanical shifting and through-headset cable routing.

Bikes with similar routing often

CHECKPOINT

face more rapid deterioration in shift performance, compared to bikes where things are routed externally, due to the tight bends the derailleur housing must make to fit into the space. It also makes replacing cables and housing a major headache, and it's costly if you're not doing it yourself.

BEST THING ABOUT THE CHECKPOINT ALR?

■ The value sweet spot: modern geometry and a feature set borrowed from the SL, delivered in a durable alloy package with smart mounts and standards – all at a starting price that leaves room in the budget for meaningful upgrades.

Because there are no proprietary parts, upgrading and swapping things like the handlebar, stem and seat post is super-easy.

THE WORST?

■ My biggest gripe with the Checkpoint ALR concerns the tyres that come as stock on the bike. The Bontrager Girona Pros aren't bad tyres; but at 42mm wide (closer to 41mm, measured using my callipers), they're too narrow for a bike with 50mm of clearance. I would have preferred something in the 45-48mm range.

WHO'S IT FOR?

■ Riders who want a single, durable gravel platform for mixed use: tarmac, gravel roads, light singletrack detours and weekend bikepacking. It will also suit endurance road riders seeking a higher bar position, and it's a great choice for anyone looking to get into gravel.

It rides like the pricier Checkpoint SL in the ways that matter most. If you're torn between this and the Checkpoint SL 5 with electronic shifting, consider the ALR, and rather put your savings towards a wheelset and tyre upgrade. ***B***

WHICH MODEL FOR ME?

We tested the Checkpoint ALR 5 Gen 3, but the bike is also available locally in two other models: the ALR 4 and ALR 3. They all share the same frame, fork and wheels, but with different drivetrain and paint options. See the full range at ***trekbikes.com***

▲
Checkpoint ALR 3 Gen 3
- R26 000
- About 10.4kg
- Shimano CUES 6000 1x10-speed

▲
Checkpoint ALR 4 Gen 3
- R33 500
- About 10.4kg
- Shimano CUES 8000 1x11-speed

▲
Checkpoint ALR 5 Gen 3
- R40 000
- About 9.9kg
- SRAM Apex XPLR 1x12-speed

7x Reasons To Ride 1x On Your Road Bike

Ditching the front derailleur is gaining popularity among road cyclists. Here's what you need to know about the 1x drivetrain trend – and whether it's right for your next upgrade.

By **MATT PHILLIPS**

THE ALL-IN-ONE CLIMBING/AERO BIKE was probably the biggest gear story of the 2025 Tour de France, but there were many other interesting equipment choices.

If you looked closely, you might have noticed some riders had skipped a front derailleur, using a 1x drivetrain. And not just on flat stages: 1x drivetrains were used even on the toughest climbing days.

Non-pro riders like us should be cautious about making equipment choices based solely on what the pros are using – we're not as fast as they are, and we don't have a convoy of cars following us to handle the issues that might crop up. But still, you might be wondering: why would someone choose 1x on a road bike? Do *I* want that?

These questions become even more relevant when you consider that the latest race bikes from big brands like Cervélo and Trek come with 1x drivetrains. Others are likely to follow.

It might not be for everyone, but 1x on a road machine is also less crazy than you might think. Here's why:

1. SIMPLICITY

One of the best things about 1x is its simplicity. There's only one shifter to deal with, and one derailleur. Shift one direction and pedalling gets harder; shift the other way and pedalling gets easier. A 1x drivetrain is easier to ride, easier to set up, and easier to maintain. And you don't have to worry about cross-chaining.

2. MORE RELIABLE SHIFTING

Because of the size difference between the large and small chainrings, a front derailleur must move the chain across a far greater vertical distance than a rear. Also, a front derailleur shift is initiated on the high-tension, top run of the chain, while a rear shift starts on the lower run of the chain, where tension is less.

Given these factors, if you're going to have an issue with your drivetrain, it will most likely be up front. Two of the most common issues are sluggish or inconsistent shifting, and routinely dropping your chain. Ditching the front derailleur eliminates these issues.

3. CHAIN RETENTION

Speaking about (not) dropping your chain… Most 1x road drivetrains borrow chain-retention technology from mountain bikes. The result is greater chain stability and security. Shifting is better on bumpy roads, and you're unlikely ever to drop your chain. If you need even more security, you can easily add a chain keeper or chain guide.

4. FRAME IMPROVEMENTS

Removing the need to accommodate a front derailleur gives engineers more design freedom in a challenging part of the structure. Without the front derailleur to consider, there are fewer holes in the frame and more potential to create a stiffer design. A front derailleur can also limit tyre clearance, and it provides a place for mud and debris to gather in mucky conditions.

And although it's not a functional improvement, 1x bikes just *look* better: faster, sleeker and cleaner.

5. AERODYNAMICS

This is not a major transformation, but removing the front derailleur does make the bike a bit more aerodynamic. We're only talking about a few watts, but if you're seeking to maximise your marginal gains, it's another area to exploit.

Images: Trevor Raab

▲ 1X CAN'T OFFER EXACTLY THE SAME RANGE AS 2X, BUT A 13X CASSETTE WILL GET YOU PRETTY CLOSE.

6. WEIGHT (MAYBE)

1x might be lighter than 2x, but not in all circumstances. It depends on how the bike is set up. All else being equal, removing the front derailleur and one front chainring will make a bike lighter; but you'll need a wide-range cassette, which can be quite heavy, plus a long-cage rear derailleur to accommodate it.

7. SIMILAR GEAR RATIOS

Without trying to cover every possible 1x and 2x gearing combination, I'll simply say that a modern 1x drivetrain can offer a similar range to a 2x system.

Here's an example: a 1x SRAM AXS XPLR 13-speed drivetrain with a 10-46t cassette and 48t chainring has a 460% range. That's close to the 494% range of a SRAM AXS 2x drivetrain with a 10-36 cassette and 48/35 chainrings.

In this example, the easiest and hardest ratios of both drivetrains are also very similar, which means they have about the same climbing gear and they spin out at about the same speed.

SO, SHOULD I UPGRADE?

One of the main drawbacks to a 1x road drivetrain is that compared to 2x, it has bigger jumps between gears. In my experience, this feeling isn't *always* present; but when it arises, it can be quite annoying. But the annoyance does fade the more you ride with a 1x system and get used to the jumps.

The gear jumps are definitely getting better with the latest 13x cassettes, but a 1x system still can't match the incremental jumps of 2x, which allow you to keep your cadence and torque as consistent as possible.

Today, most road bikes are still sold with 2x, and sticking with that is easiest for many riders. But if you're willing to accept the slightly bigger gear jumps, today's 1x options allow riders to puzzle together a drivetrain that has the same range and ratio of a 2x set-up, but simpler, more reliable, slightly more aerodynamic, and potentially lighter.

Both set-ups are highly tuneable to a rider's needs, with multiple cassette and chainring options available. And with wireless electronic shifting, it's relatively easy to remove or add a front derailleur, or change the rear derailleur between 1x-specific and 2x-compatible options. (Disclaimer: swapping and 'tuning' might be easy, but it's expensive.)

Frankly, one of the biggest considerations is whether your bike has a Shimano or SRAM drivetrain. SRAM has taken bold steps to build 1x-compatibility into its road drivetrains – they offer a wide selection of cassette and chainring options so riders can get the gearing they need. Shimano's road groupsets, on the other hand, are not (yet) designed with 1x in mind. That doesn't mean it's impossible to run a 1x system using Shimano parts, but the options are more limited.

And for the lucky few who get to ride Campagnolo… their new Super Record 13 groupset offers 1x and 2x options.

The 2x chainring set-up has all but disappeared in mountain biking, and it's a rare sight on a gravel bike. There are still tangible benefits to riding 2x on a road bike; but 1x technology is catching up, and the days of the front derailleur might be limited. Watch this space…

Oops!... We Did It Again

Just as 29-inch wheels shook up mountain biking in the 2000s, even bigger 32-inch wheels are doing it again. Major brands and custom builders alike are betting on the new standard, signalling 'big' changes in bike performance and design.

By **MATT PHILLIPS**

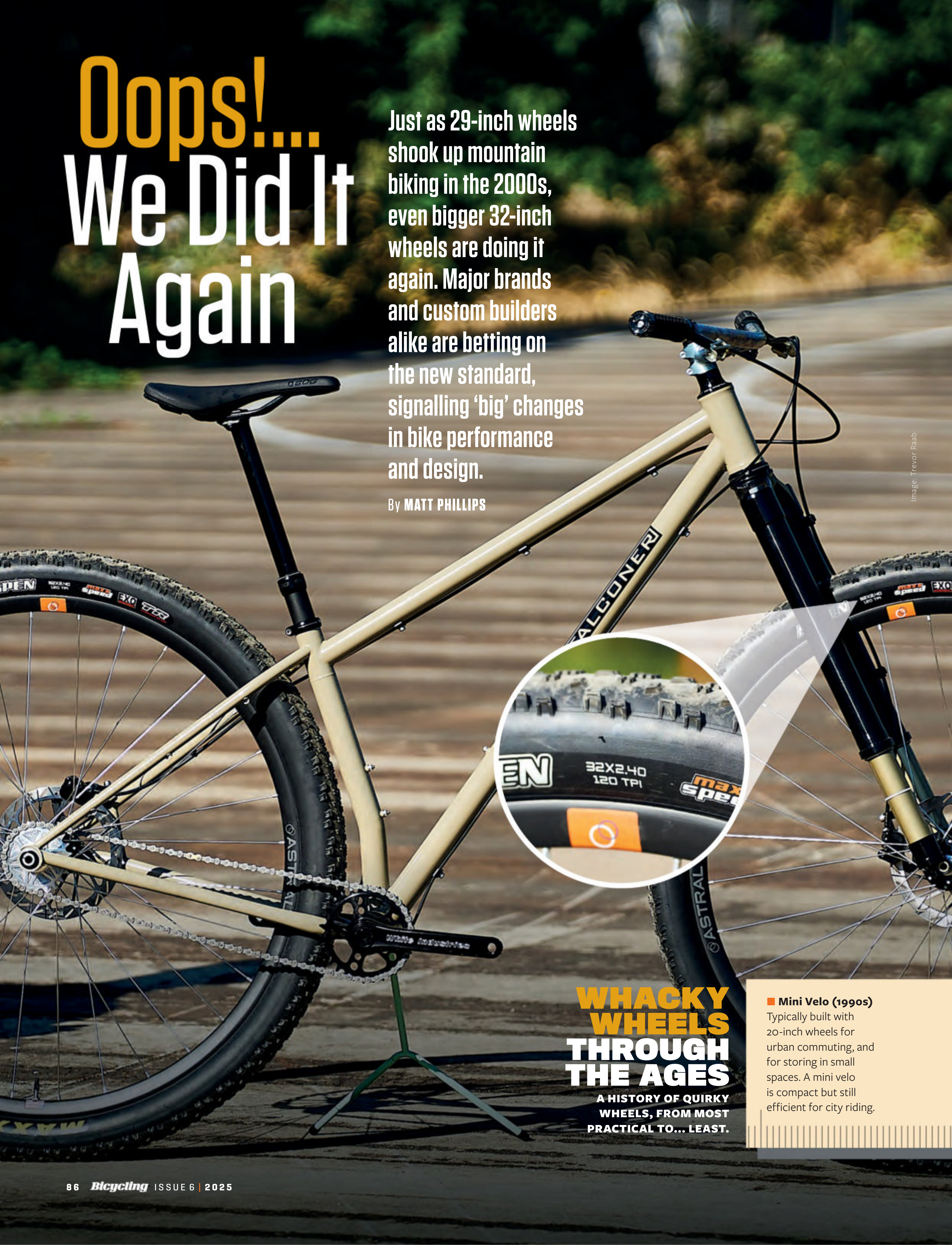


Image: Trevor Raab

WHACKY WHEELS THROUGH THE AGES

A HISTORY OF QUIRKY WHEELS, FROM MOST PRACTICAL TO... LEAST.

■ **Mini Velo (1990s)**
Typically built with 20-inch wheels for urban commuting, and for storing in small spaces. A mini velo is compact but still efficient for city riding.

AT *MADE* THIS YEAR – THE HAND-BUILT and custom bicycle trade show in the US – several mountain bikes were built around the emerging 32-inch wheel standard.

The custom bike to your left, for example, made by Cameron Falconer, was displayed at the Astral wheels booth. It's a stunning example of the trend, outfitted with a suspension fork (and brakes) from German company Intend Bicycle Components. The Falconer was at the Astral booth to showcase prototypes of their 32-inch Outback alloy MTB rims. So-called '32ers' were also seen at the BTCHN and Neuhaus booths.

A show like MADE often telegraphs trends that will soon go mainstream. And it looks like we're at the beginning of the next big wheel shake-up.

We've been through this before. As a grizzled old gear guy, I was testing MTBs for *Bicycling* in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when 29-inch wheels first appeared. Based on that experience, I have a good idea how the transition to 32-inch wheels might unfold…

However, there's a notable difference that will make adopting the 32-inch standard different from adopting the 29-inch standard: back when the 29er trend started, 29 was new to mountain bikes, but it wasn't new to the bike industry. 29-inch was just the common 700c wheel, by another name. So, even though there were major growing pains to bring the performance of 29-inch mountain bikes to where they are today, it wasn't like the industry was starting from scratch.

With 32-inch wheels, they *are* essentially starting from scratch. But I think that the knowledge gained during the 26-to-29 transition will help make the transition to 32-inch wheels much 'smoother', should the demand for bigger wheels necessitate the shift.

WHY 32-INCH?

■ For the same benefits that were touted when 29-inch wheels showed up as an alternative to 26-inch wheels: bigger wheels roll more smoothly (and therefore faster) over bumps; they offer more traction for climbing, braking and cornering; and stability is improved.

There are some drawbacks: more material, so almost all 32-specific parts are heavier; anything longer and larger is usually less stiff; there are (currently) fewer equipment choices; there are frame geometry challenges that have yet to be overcome; and adopting a major new standard is always disruptive.

As for the best use of the new, bigger wheels, it seems that they're most suited to cross-country (XC) racing. Creating longer-travel bikes with such large wheels is a geometry headache and calls for even longer front centres, even longer chain stays, and steeper seat tube angles. It also seems as if 32-inch wheels will benefit taller riders on XL and XXL frames. A bike with bigger wheels obviously has a higher stand-over height and a taller minimum handlebar height.

Playing devil's advocate, we said the same things about 29-inch wheels back when we were all riding 26-inch bikes. You can find plenty of 29-inch wheels on enduro and downhill bikes, not just XC bikes; and pint-sized Sina Frei – who is only 1.51m tall – races World Cup cross country on a 29er…

On steeper terrain, the issue of butt clearance with larger wheels also comes into play. This is already an issue with 29-inch wheels, leading many riders who tackle demanding terrain to opt for a 27.5-inch rear wheel to gain better clearance. Will we see nü-mullet bikes with a 32-inch front wheel and a 29-inch rear? Maybe.

HOW PRACTICAL IS IT?

■ A new mountain bike wheel size won't – can't – take off until there are multiple and widely available suspension forks and tyre offerings. And those things won't be made until one of the major brands commits to a large order.

Word on the street is that brands like Trek, Specialized, Cannondale and Scott – essentially any brand with a major presence at the top level of cross-country racing – are all testing bikes with 32-inch wheels. BMC broke the internet with their 'Fahrenheit Project' 32-inch prototype at the Andorra World Cup XC race in July, which Titouan Carod used on a few practice laps. We know it's coming.

So far, there's only one high-quality tyre available in the 32-inch size: the XC-focused Maxxis Aspen. Maxxis should be able to add more tread options more easily than most, but the challenge for them and other tyre brands is that existing moulding machines are too small to produce a 32-inch tyre. New, bigger machines will be required to enable mass production of the new standard.

With those stumbling blocks in mind, it will probably take several years before mature products fully support the new wheel size; but this timeline depends entirely on how widespread the demand is.

Until then, any custom builder worth his or her torch can build a bike that will accommodate 32-inch wheels; and smaller, more nimble brands will probably do limited runs of stock big-wheel bikes.

At MADE, for example, I learnt that Neuhaus is working on a 32-inch version of their Taiwanese-made Hummingbird Core. The 29er Hummingbird frame costs about R20k and features modular sliding dropouts that support single-speed and geared set-ups. The 32-inch version will probably have many of the same features, but will only be available in medium, large and extra-large.

As with any new tech in cycling, 32-inch wheels will attract early adopters, enthusiasts and sceptics, and outright haters. It will take time to develop geometry that maximises the advantages of the larger wheel. The bikes will be heavy initially, but the weight of the components will decrease as brands adapt. If demand proves to be strong, brands will improve and refine 32-inch bikes and accessories, reducing drawbacks so the benefits become clear.

Trust me: it's happened before. ***B***

■ **Fat Bike (1980s)**
Usually a 26-inch wheel with a massive, four- to six-inch tyre – for snow, sand and adventure riding. Handles extreme terrain where normal MTBs fail.

■ **Safety Bicycle (1890s)**
The forerunner of the modern bicycle, this design allowed for much smaller wheels and replaced the need for the large, directly-pedalled front wheel of the penny-farthing.

■ **Penny-farthing (1870s)**
The front wheel of this contraption could be as big as 60 inches! It offered speed before gears existed, but it was extremely dangerous and impractical.

■ **Clown Bike (1960s)**
A tiny bike with six- to eight-inch wheels. For circus tricks only…

THE Joyride GIFT GUIDE

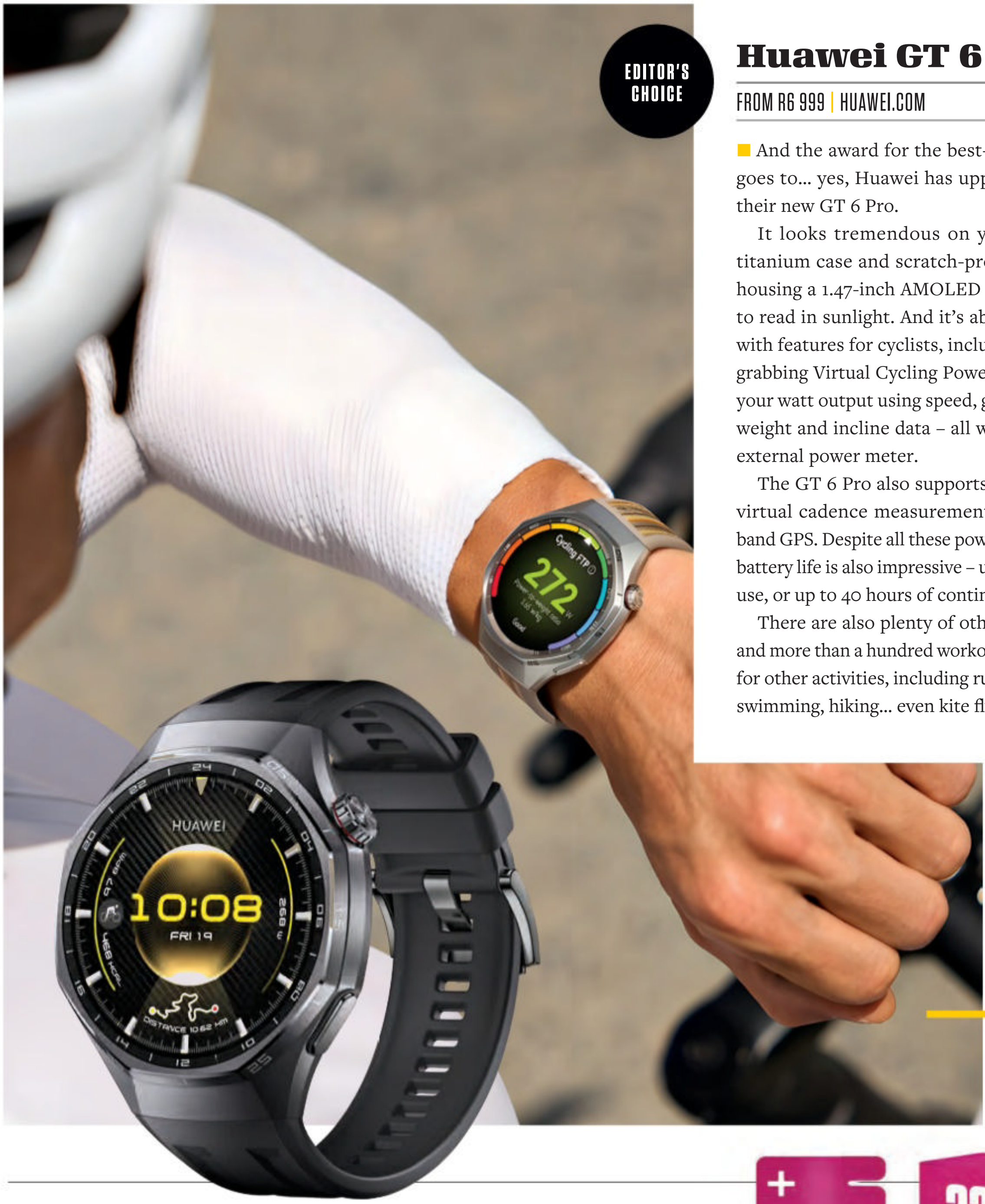
LOOKING FOR FESTIVE-SEASON SPOILS FOR THE CYCLIST IN YOUR LIFE? WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED. HERE ARE 20 CYCLE-TASTIC GIFTS GUARANTEED TO BRING MILES OF SMILES.

Compiled by **JON MINSTER**

LEATT
24° 10:10
ENDURO MTB
2521km
LAST RIDE
17 JUN
7.6
24.77
3:16:15
GARMIN

ParkTool
PCS-10.3
ParkTool

THULE
RAIL 2



EDITOR'S CHOICE

Huawei GT 6 Pro

FROM R6 999 | HUAWEI.COM

■ And the award for the best-value smartwatch goes to... yes, Huawei has upped the game with their new GT 6 Pro.

It looks tremendous on your wrist, with a titanium case and scratch-proof sapphire glass housing a 1.47-inch AMOLED display that's easy to read in sunlight. And it's absolutely crammed with features for cyclists, including the headline-grabbing Virtual Cycling Power, which estimates your watt output using speed, gradient, rider/bike weight and incline data – all without needing an external power meter.

The GT 6 Pro also supports FTP tracking and virtual cadence measurement, and it has dual-band GPS. Despite all these power-hungry features, battery life is also impressive – up to 21 days of light use, or up to 40 hours of continuous tracking.

There are also plenty of other health features, and more than a hundred workout and sport modes for other activities, including running, open-water swimming, hiking... even kite flying!

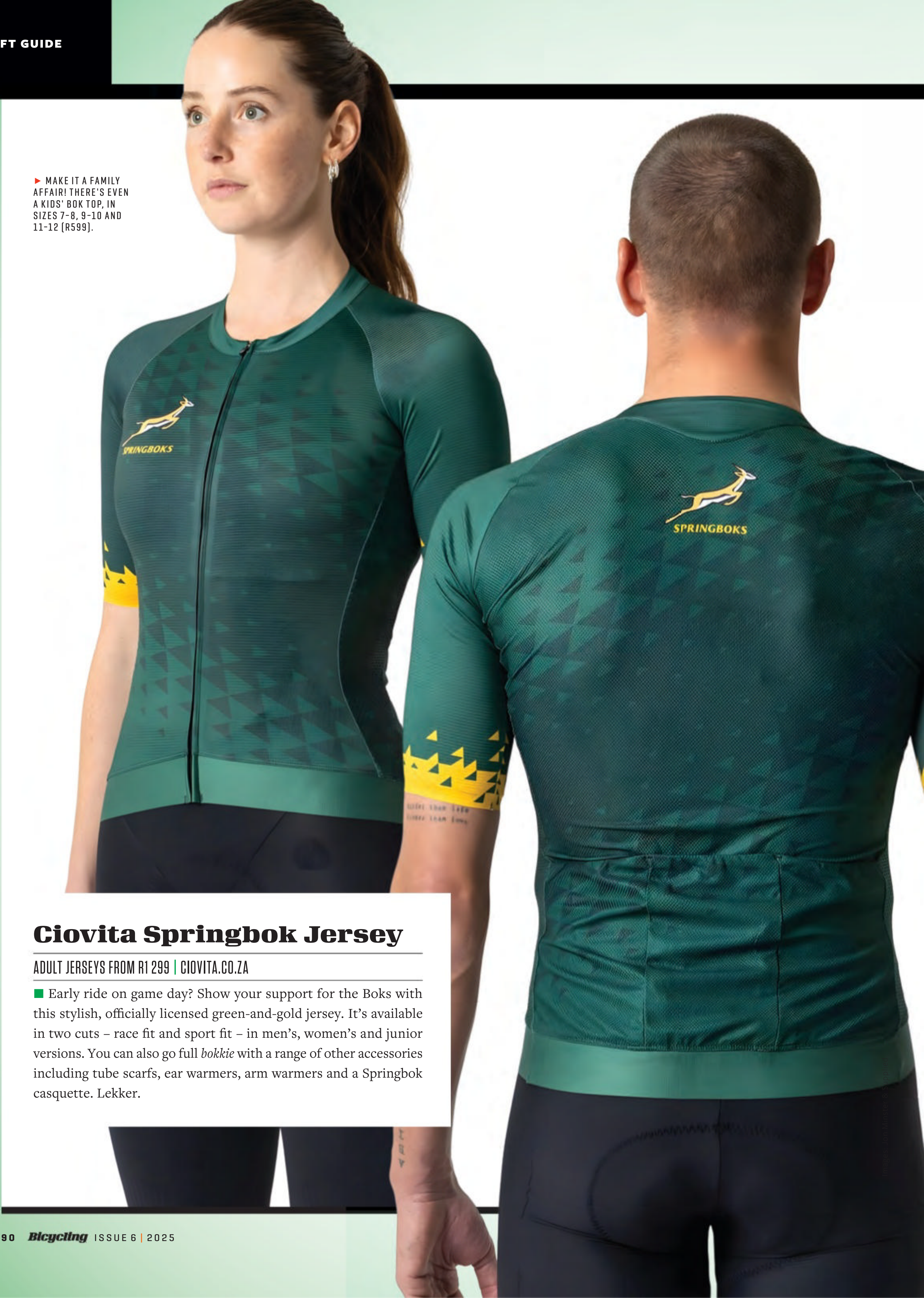
Images: Supplied

226ers High-Fructose Gel 8-Pack

R509 | 226ERS.CO.ZA

■ Nutrition, nutrition, nutrition... The more we learn about the body's ability to absorb carbohydrates, the more crucial the right feeding strategy becomes. Get this eight-pack of gels for the race snake in the family – each one is formulated with maltodextrin and fructose in a ratio of 10:8, providing a high carbohydrate content of 30g per 44g gel. They contain sodium, they're vegan-friendly, and they come in six flavours. Winning.

226ERS
HIGH FRUCTOSE GEL
STRAWBERRY
226ERS
HIGH FRUCTOSE GEL XS
STRAWBERRY



► MAKE IT A FAMILY AFFAIR! THERE'S EVEN A KIDS' BOK TOP, IN SIZES 7-8, 9-10 AND 11-12 (R599).

Ciovita Springbok Jersey

ADULT JERSEYS FROM R1 299 | CIOVITA.CO.ZA

■ Early ride on game day? Show your support for the Boks with this stylish, officially licensed green-and-gold jersey. It's available in two cuts – race fit and sport fit – in men's, women's and junior versions. You can also go full *bokkie* with a range of other accessories including tube scarfs, ear warmers, arm warmers and a Springbok casquette. Lekker.

▲ IF YOU'RE A RACE SNAKE, CHECK OUT THE ENDURANCE 4.0 – A SLIGHTLY LIGHTER, MORE VENTED VERSION (R3 499).

Leatt Endurance 3.0 Helmet

R2 699 | ZA.LEATT.COM

Known more for their range of gravity-focused helmets, the Endurance is Leatt's very well-priced solution for XC race protection. The 3.0 version weighs only 350g and features the brand's 360° Turbine Technology, which – like MIPS – reduces rotational acceleration and impact forces to the head and brain during an impact. There are plenty of strategically placed vents and extended rear coverage for some added protection. Also available in black, 'lime', 'lava' and 'pistachio'.

RAIL 2
THULE

Thule Rail 2l Hip Pack

R1 799 | THULESTORE.CO.ZA

Unless you're Alan Hatherly, mountain biking and skin-tight lycra don't go nicely together; when you're out riding berms in the forest, you'd rather be in something looser-fitting. But that kind of trail tee often doesn't have pockets, which means you have nowhere to store your stuff. Enter the two-litre Rail hip pack – it's the perfect size to hold your essentials, with internal organisation including tool loops, a key clip and a phone pocket. The breathable, perforated back panel and adjustable belt ensure a secure and comfortable fit, and there's even space for two water bottles on the sides if you're planning a longer ride.

Oakley Drops 2.0 Gloves

R890 | BASH.COM

These stylish roadie gloves offer a snug, comfortable fit with a stretch nylon upper and breathable mesh between the fingers. Padded areas on the palm reduce road vibration, and there's a microsuede thumb for wiping sweat before it drips onto your Oakley shades. They're on the pricey end of the scale, but they're well-made and should last many seasons.

Images: Supplied

ALWAYS
COFFE
BAR
0.0
3.8
RYDER

Ryder Electronic Tyre Pump

R999 | RYDERCYCLING.CO.ZA

■ We were sceptical about these newfangled rechargeable pumps – until we saw one in action. They work! Small enough to fit in your jersey pocket, less volatile than a CO2 cartridge, easier to use than a normal pump... What's not to like?

This one from local brand Ryder has an easy-to-read display and a 400mAh battery that gives the pump the equivalent capacity of more than three bombs. Fully charged, you can pump as many as five road tyres or four MTB tyres from flat. It's not the fastest, so it's not a race tool; but it's fantastic for weekend missions and everyday riding.

◂ SET THE PRESSURE, ATTACH TO THE VALVE, PRESS THE BUTTON AND OFF YOU GO.

First Ascent Enduro Hydration Pack

R1 299 | FIRSTASCENT.CO.ZA

Hydration packs are enjoying a renaissance – they're popular again, especially in marathon and gravel-racing circles. This is largely thanks to new low-profile designs that stop the pack from bouncing around on your back. The locally-designed Enduro has a great harness system (yes, it also reminds us of a well-known Swedish brand…) plus a two-litre TPU bladder and a removable exterior pocket where you can stash snacks and a jacket. It's well-priced and practical – you can't go wrong.

Lezyne Pocket Torque Drive

R890 | BIKEADDICT.CO.ZA

You don't want to take chances with over- or under-tightening critical components – like anything that attaches to a carbon handlebar, or your stem bolts. That's where this little torque driver comes into play: it's the perfect tool for travelling, or if space is limited in your home workshop.

It's adjustable between 2 to 6Nm in 0.5Nm increments, and made from lightweight machined aluminium, with six hardened steel bits (2.5 to 5mm hex and T20/T25 Torx) and a key for extra leverage. The whole bang shoot packs away neatly in a case that will fit into your toolbox, or even your back pocket if required.

Trek Foray MTB shoes

R4 000 | TREKBIKES.COM

What do you want from a pair of mountain-bike shoes? Well, you want them to be suitably stiff, so you don't waste energy pedalling, but you also want to be able to walk in them without feeling like you have metal sheeting strapped to your feet. The Trek Foray gets this balance right. The embedded nylon plate is stiff enough for efficient pedalling, but flexible enough in case you need to hike-a-bike. The outsole is designed for that, too; and the toe box area has Trek's 'METNET' stretch technology that conforms to your foot for extra comfort on longer rides. They're available in black, but we love this white and gum colourway. Also great for gravel riding.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

BOA
TREK
METNET

Images: Mike Finch / Supplied

A STAND MAKES BASIC BIKE MAINTENANCE AT HOME MUCH EASIER. SERVICING YOUR OWN BIKE WILL SAVE YOU PLENTY OF MONEY IN THE LONG TERM, AND IT'S FUN!

Park Tool PCS 10.3 Stand

R4 795 | EVOBIKES.CO.ZA

Every serious home workshop needs a serious bike stand – and this is one of the best. It's robust, and offers excellent stability and flexibility. The micro-adjustable cam clamp securely grips tubes from 22 to 76 mm in diameter, and it rotates 360° for full access.

The steel 'teardrop' tubing and wide, triangular base resist tipping, even under heavy bikes, and height adjusts from about 99 to 145cm. There's also a thoughtful spring-button that prevents leg collapse – a fix over earlier models. Plus, it just looks pro to have this thing standing in your garage.

RideNow TPU Tubes

R120 | TEMU.COM

Yes, we've listed Temu as a stockist because that's where they're cheapest, but many local bike shops stock these ultra-lightweight tubes, made from thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) instead of standard butyl. They retain air better and roll faster, but they're more difficult to patch and require some care when installing. Use them for your race rig, or pack one as a spare if you're running tubeless or standard tubes – they weigh only 36g, and take up hardly any space in your saddle bag.

Images: Supplied

◀ BLACK IS PRACTICAL, BUT THESE GRIPS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE IN A RANGE OF OTHER COLOURS.

ESI Ribbed Chunky Grips

R550 | CYCLELAB.COM

■ There are plenty of cheaper silicone grips out there, but not many are as good as these from ESI, the OG lightweight grip brand. They're made from 100% silicone (latex- and rubber-free), which makes them gentle on hands in wet and dry conditions. They're thicker than standard grips for better cushioning, and the ribbed texture adds even more traction. Best of all, they still weigh next to nothing (60g for the pair), so you get all the comfort without adding unnecessary bulk to your cockpit.

Csixx Magnetic Quick Link Top Cap

R425 | ZA.CSIXX.COM

■ This is such a cool upgrade for your mountain bike. Available in various designs, and even custom colours, this top cap mounts flush and snaps closed thanks to powerful magnets. Inside, you can stash a pair of quick links – out of sight and out of mind, until that one ride where you really need them...

Muc-Off
fast action bike cleaner
Muc-Off
BIKE SPRAY
Muc-Off
Muc-Off
Muc-Off

Muc-Off 8-in-1 Bike Cleaning Kit

R1 190 | BIKEADDICT.CO.ZA

■ Riding bikes is only half the fun. If you're prone to a bit of OCD, you'll know that washing your bike after the ride can be equally satisfying. This kit includes a litre of Muc-Off's acclaimed 'Nano Tech Bike Cleaner', which apparently has tiny particles that get into all the places normal detergent doesn't, plus multiple brushes (soft, detail, claw, two-prong), a sponge, protective frame spray and a tub that doubles as a parts-washing station.

The brushes are great, and the frame spray does a good job of stopping grit from clinging to your clean bike. It's a bit pricey for what you get, and some tools overlap with easily sourced alternatives; but it's a nice all-in-one kit that saves the neat freak in your family from having to hunt for individual parts.

▶ EVERYONE NEEDS A GREAT, EVERYDAY CAP – THIS ONE FROM KILLAT IS THE BUSINESS.

Killat Trail Cap

R450 | KILLATGEAR.COM

■ Okay, fine – this is a trail-running cap. But it's a great one. Locally designed and made in Cape Town, in a funky colourway, it's the perfect cap to throw into your post-race bag to protect your face from the sun when you're hanging in the beer tent, or to take with you on a bikepacking mission. (It's also good if you decide to take up that other funny sport in the mountains...)

Trek Aeolus Elite saddle

R2 000 | TREKBIKES.COM

■ This new saddle from Trek is aimed at riders who want to get into an aggressive, forward-facing position, but still ride in comfort all day – in other words, roadies, gravel grinders and XC mountain bikers. With a short nose and full cut-out, it's available in three sizes and designed for men and women.

AEOLUS ELITE

Images: Supplied

D'Arcs Vantage Sunglasses

R1 399 | DARCS.CO.ZA

■ If you regularly ride in the early morning, before sun-up, you need a good pair of photochromic glasses. The lenses stay clear when it's dark and tint automatically as you ride into the dawn. You can also use them in gloomy conditions, or when it's raining, to give your eyes maximum protection.

They tend to be pricey, though, which is why these from D'Arcs are special – they don't cost the earth, but the lenses are quality, the glasses fit brilliantly with an adjustable nosepiece, and the overall build quality is excellent, designed to last many years.

Restrap Coffee Dripper

R300 | EVERYDAYCYCLESUPPLYCO.COM

■ Want to make your favourite bikepacker very happy? Get them this inspired piece of kit, designed to make a proper cup of coffee on the road. Weighing less than 50g, it's made of three snap-together pieces that form a tidy stand for a widely available V60 coffee filter, before collapsing flat into a textured nylon pouch that you can slip into just about any pouch or pocket.

Garmin Edge MTB

R7 999 | CYCLELAB.COM

■ The Edge MTB is the most rugged unit Garmin has produced, designed specifically for mountain biking. It's compact, weighing around 56g, with a full-colour 2.1-inch Gorilla Glass display and physical buttons that you can use in the mud and rain, with gloves on.

Besides all the usual Garmin features, there are also trail-specific ones like downhill and enduro profiles, something called 'Forksight' for upcoming trail info, and timing gates for when you're trying to break your Strava records down the snake trails in Tokai. The feature set is actually fairly overwhelming, especially for new users; it pays to take some time to get to know the device and customise it properly to your needs. *B*

24° 10:10
ENDURO MTB
2521km
LAST RIDE
17 JUN
7.6 km/h
24.77 km
3:16:15
GARMIN

THE COFFEE PERSONALITY GUIDE

COFFEE IS THE **MYERS-BRIGGS TEST** FOR CYCLISTS. HERE'S WHAT YOUR CHOSEN BREW SAYS ABOUT YOU.

Double espresso
After racing everyone up Chapman's Peak, you're now stamping your foot, impatient to go again. You call it a *doppio* because it sounds more Euro-pro. Also, because *singolo* is for cyclists who wear hydration packs on road rides. Deep down, you believe that the extra caffeine is aero. Your tongue does not feel pain.
Respect rating: ●●●●●

Cold brew
Your gravel bike has a name and its own Instagram profile. You believe that a 0.2-degree change to the head angle actually affects how a bike handles. Your dog is called 'Girona' and you probably have a Campagnolo tattoo.
Respect rating: ●●●●

Americano
You're practical, and don't like fuss. You ride endurance miles and secretly dream of bikepacking, but haven't yet. You make lowball offers for bike parts on Facebook Marketplace. You never ride in the afternoon.
Respect rating: ●●●

Flat white
You take photos of your coffee for Strava, and you let someone else pay for it. Your preference is to sit third wheel in the group. When someone asks, "What route are we riding?" you say, "I'm easy." You have to be home by 10am.
Respect rating: ●●●

Oat-milk latte
You believe that the two-minute rule doesn't apply to you and you're always late, which is why you have an e-bike that you can put into boost mode to catch up with the group. You believe that oat milk makes you edgy. It doesn't. It makes you lactose intolerant.
Respect rating: ●●

Tea
Who are you? When did you join this group ride? What have you done with Kevin?
Respect rating: ● **B**

Words: Jon Minster Images: Getty; Canva

RIDE BOLD

You'll only perform as good as you feel. With feedback from the Insect Science Pro Team we've refined our range and created a colour palette as bold as your ambitions.

first Ascent

GARMIN
10:00
+
−
8%
↔1.9 km
12%
⇧222 m
SPEED
DISTANCE
19.66 km/h
42.13 km
GARMIN
GARMIN

EDGE® 550 | 850
GPS CYCLING COMPUTERS
WITH VIVID COLOUR DISPLAYS